

## Media Studies – Statement of Curriculum Intent

The Media Studies department has always understood the importance of the subject – not just at an academic level but as a way for students navigate through life. So much of what we do is dictated by the media around us that we want all our students to stay in control of their own consumption of it. On both a conscious and subconscious level.

We have always aimed to have engaging and challenging lessons that allow the students to question the media around them and themselves in relation to it. Although the course content is set by the exam board (Eduqas), students find it meaningful and relevant to their own lives – even when looking at chocolate adverts from the 1950s. The students learn deep analytical skills and are able to look at the meaning of media ‘language’ in a range of texts, as well as a clear understanding of how people, places and issues are represented. This is done with set texts, studied in class, and unseen texts that they will see for the first time in the exam. This ability to analyse the meaning and intent of any media text gives them skills that they can use in a number of other subjects too (e.g. English, Art, Cultural Studies...) and at all levels. It also allows them to understand their own media use on a level that is beyond what most of their peers are capable of.

In addition to studying Media Language and Representation, students also learn about the history of Media Theory, which covers a range of media theorists and theories. This means Media Studies is in the unique position of having the students also learn about the history of the subject as well as learning the subject itself. Looking at theorists such as Barthes, Hall, Mulvey etc. gives students the opportunity to learn in a way that was previously reserved for A Level – if not degree level – students, as they are forced to cite sources and examples from existing theorists rather than just showing their own understanding of the subject. Including references and theoretical sources can be a difficult challenge even for postgraduate students so it is good that to have started this at a much earlier level. I think our students will be in good standing when they reach university (even those who don’t study a media or related subject), as they will be experienced in academic research.

The above pillars of the course are focused on the analytical and theoretical understanding of Media Studies but students also have to show their knowledge and comprehension. The skill of recalling facts and showing their understanding is used in the two final pillars: industry and audience. Industry requires students to look at various media institutions (including Public Broadcast Radio, Newspapers, Film, TV, Music Industry and Video Games) and show their understanding of the four strands of industry: production, distribution, exhibition, and regulation. Audience asks students to look at how, why and what different audiences consume. They are taught to look at demographics and psychographics of social groups and think about how they are appealed to by different media brands. Different audience theories are applied in a number of ways here.

There is a lot for them to remember for the exams and so recall and retention techniques are taught explicitly along with the course content. It is a lot for students to do in just two years – every lesson

becomes vital – but the students are engaged and interested in what we offer and don't mind putting the effort to cover all they need for the exams.

We follow the Eduqas GCSE syllabus. To prepare them for those exams, we have mock exams and practice exams throughout the year. Each exam tests them on the content they have learnt so far, which means the exams get longer and broader as the course goes on. Some of these exams, particularly ones that require official marks for the school, are marked and graded solely by the class teachers (and moderated within the department). However, for a few years now we have also encouraged students to mark their own work and give themselves feedback to improve. This is led by the teachers, who use Eduqas' own mark criteria (though with the language simplified to be accessible by all), as well as model answers. Students are encouraged to be as critical of their work as possible – and are often more pessimistic about what marks they deserve than would be the reality! This means they are aware of what they need to do to improve and get into the habit of 'live marking' whilst answering questions in the final exams. For the best results, teachers are encouraged to leave as long of a gap as possible (we would suggest a minimum of two weeks or even just before returning to the topic later in the year) so that students aren't thinking about the effort they put in to the task and mistaking it for quality of answers.

Of course, learning all this new content and skills means students having to learn a whole new vocabulary. In addition to having a new way of reading the media, they also have a new way of speaking and writing about it. There are many Tier 2 words that they may use in other subjects (e.g. representation, juxtaposition, connotation, etc.) such as English. But there is also a huge number of Tier 3 words they have to introduce into their own lexicon. As they haven't done Media in previous years, it is highly unlikely they will have come across any of the Tier 3 words before. Especially, as many adults have also never come across them. These are words such as synergy, convergence, hypermasculinity, conglomerate and hegemony. Students usually love finding out new words as it gives them away of vocalising things they had previously only thought. Within a few months, they use this terminology in a natural way in both their writing and class discussions.

As well as the exam sections of the course, there is also the Non-Exam Assessment (NEA). The NEA is worth 30% of their final grade and students are assessed on their technical, theoretical and creative skills. They need to take all the knowledge and understanding they have learnt from studying existing media products and use it to create their own. This is in the form of a completely original print media product. In the past, students have had to create Film Marketing (full DVD case and poster) and Magazines (cover, contents page and article) but in theory could be anything. The students begin by writing a Statement of Aims where they explain how they will use specific media theories to reach their intended target audience. They also need to say how they will represent people (or places or issues) and how their product will fit into the existing marketplace. They are therefore applying every area of study – Media Language, Representation, Industries and Audiences – to their work. However, the most challenging part is sticking to the word count. The Statement of Aims has to be approximately just 250 words.

To create their NEAs, they have to use all their own photos (usually a minimum of six) meaning we have to teach students photography skills to help get them started. The department does have camera equipment that can be lent out but these days most students have smartphones that take high quality pictures. To edit and mould their images into a finished media product, students use computer programmes that they have access to in school. For example, we use InDesign, Publisher etc. to help with the structure and design of a page. However, the programme where most of their work is done is Adobe Photoshop. This is a programme primarily used for image manipulation and has a huge breadth of functions and features. We assume that students have never used any of the programmes before, so teach them from scratch and start straight away on Year 10. Most practical time is spent learning the basics of Photoshop. The first few Photoshop lessons are step by step guides that go through the essential tools and features. After that, students are encouraged to work on their own to make things and 'play around'. The reality is that even if we spent every minute of every lesson teaching different aspects of Photoshop, students would still only scratch the surface of what it can do. It can take years for professional designers to 'master' it. Therefore, students are encouraged to learn and practice themselves. They all have individual goals and it is really gratifying watching them work out how to get there. Of course, we have created many tutorials they can easily access and the experienced teachers are always able to lend a hand when needed.

For the majority of students, Photoshop isn't something they can do at home. However, the NEA is where the department really uses the benefits of home learning. Although there are number of home learning activities throughout the course (preparing for new units, revision tasks, research questions etc), it is in the preparation for their NEAs where the ability to do home learning really enhances what they can do in class. Students use their home learning time to plan their photos, sketch their designs and, most importantly, take the photos they will use for the final NEA. By taking their photographs outside of school, they are given the chance to explore a range of locations, models, props, costumes etc. Removing the limitations of being in school means they can push their creativity. One student, who really wanted stars Morgan Freeman and Tom Hardy to be in his promotional materials, had the ingenious ideas of travelling to Madame Tussauds to capture their waxworks. It was a fantastic way of having original photos of Hollywood actors.

Studying the media is essentially studying cultures from different places and times and so the course is an excellent way of raising students (and the school's) cultural capital. The set texts are mainly British but cover a wide spectrum of British culture and its cultural history. Studying adverts from the 1950s, and comparing them to modern ones, allows students to see how demographics have been changed by the culture around them. It gives them an understanding of how their own culture has been shaped today. They also look at different magazines and newspapers aimed at representing a range of ethnic and social groups. This gives them an understanding of cultures that are outside their own and broadens their own cultural capital. Every unit we study enhances their own cultural capital and their understanding of wider cultures. When they come to create their NEAs, they have a chance to show this through their own imagination and creativity.

As stated above, there is no KS3 for Media Studies meaning the GCSE is the first time they are introduced to the subject. While some subjects, like art and computing, have some transferable technical and creative skills, the subject that gives them the most grounding in the subject is KS3

English. It is in this subject where they begin to use their analytical skills, think about audiences and start to look for deeper meanings in texts. Although they may not all have heard the word, KS3 English is where students first start to look for connotations – a fundamental skill in Media Studies. Another subject where students need to interpret meaning is in KS3 History where students learn to look for meaning through images and think about different audiences through time. Some of the students at Dorothy Stringer also take the Cultural Capital class in Year 9. This really benefits Media students as it gives them a greater understanding of engrained British culture.

Students who take Media Studies are often surprised about how much it crosses over into the other subjects they take in Year 10 and 11 at Dorothy Stringer. The analytical skills in Media are used in a number of subjects where they have to read texts. Subjects such as History and English, where students have to show an understanding of a range of texts and their intended audiences, are benefited by the skills taught in Media Studies. Students are also able to use some of the skills they learn in other options subjects and use them in Media Studies. And the reverse is also often true. For example, GCSE Photography helps students take better technical photographs in Media Studies, whereas Media Studies encourages photography students to think about Representation, Media Language and Audiences in their photos. There are many other similar examples in subjects like Drama, Computing etc. There is also a chance for Media students to use their skills in an extra-curricular capacity. For example, many Media students go on to produce the Y11 yearbook.

The majority of our students go on to study Media Studies (or a related subject such as Film Studies, Creative Media, etc.) in Post-16 Education. Those who do go on to take the A-Level or equivalent are well-prepared for the course. Teachers from colleges have told us that they can always tell when a student has done Media Studies with us, as they always show a lot of experience and ability. The GCSE course is designed as a steppingstone to the A-Level and we always keep in contact with different colleges to see what they offer and how we can prepare our students. Once they have finished the A-Level, many of our students go on to study Media at degree level. Ex-students often contact us to let us know what projects they are working on or where they are studying, and Dorothy Stringer Media Students have joined courses all over the country and the world.

After they finish their education, many go on to work in the media. The sector has grown exponentially in the past decade and there are now many media jobs for ex-media studies students. This is particularly true in Brighton and Hove. In the past, most had to travel to London and other larger cities but Brighton now has a healthy media industry that is still growing. For example, the video game industry alone employs 1000+ people in Brighton and Hove. This is as high as 2000 if you travel to the local areas (video game giants SEGA employ 750+ in Horsham). And this is just one area of the media that ex-students are employed in. There are many other opportunities available too.

As you might expect, our alumni go on to do a range of interesting and exciting jobs. This includes journalism (including Eurogamer.net, The Sunday Times), TV advert design (including Coca Cola, Range Rover), TV Producers (including Britain's Got Talent) and many more. Our students have gone on to find jobs all over the world and even start their own media companies. Although we often

eventually lose touch with our ex-students, it is uplifting when we read their names in magazines or see them in the credits on TV.