## GENERAL COMMENTS

This Media School-assessed Task involves three outcomes: two in Unit 3 and the third in Unit 4. In Unit 3 students undertake Outcome 2, Media Production Skills, and Outcome 3, a Media Production Design. In Unit 4 students undertake Outcome 1, Media Process, in which they complete the product they designed in Unit 3. The assessment of the School-assessed Task is reviewed by visitation. Teachers should retain students' Production exercises and ensure that students maintain their Design Plans, work from them and submit the plan with the production as part of the assessment. Three of the seven assessment criteria for the School-assessed Task relate directly to the Design Plan.

**Media Production Exercises**

In 2006 the scope of the task specified that students undertake two Production exercises. The scope of the task is unchanged for 2007. The School-assessed Task advice in the February 2007 *VCAA Bulletin VCE, VCAL and VET* contains specific and detailed advice on the nature, scope and administration of the School-assessed Task. Teachers are urged to consider this advice when planning for and teaching this Area of Study as well as when planning the task. The Production exercises should be clearly differentiated from the teaching and learning phase of this Area of Study and from each other.

Exercises should be clearly labelled as 'Production exercise 1' and 'Production exercise 2'. Each exercise should be accompanied by documentation that includes:
- a description of the intention(s) of the exercise
- a description of the media production design plan specification(s) to be explored and/or investigated
- an explanation of how the completed exercise realises the intention(s) of the exercise.

Teachers should pay particular attention to the relative weighting of the production exercises in the assessment of the School-assessed Task. It is not appropriate for students to undertake a completed production for this outcome. In the work reviewed in 2006, there was again evidence that students who were asked to complete a production subsequently lost momentum. As a result, their Design Plan suffered in terms of depth and attention to the specifications required.

To facilitate their return to students and simplify the review process, it is important that Production exercises be stored securely by the school together with each student's Design Plan and production. If subject to review, students cannot be scored for work that is not presented for assessment. Lost, stolen or damaged work should be reported to the VCAA by the Principal using the appropriate form, located at <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/schooladmin/forms/vce/lsd.pdf>.

**Design Plan**

While there is no single, set way to complete a Design Plan, there were some features that were common to excellent plans. The most fundamental of these was a specific reference by the student to the Design Plan specifications relevant to the medium being used. 'Intention and audience' is one specification common to all production formats, and should be explored in some detail. Other specifications refer more precisely to particular media forms. A comprehensive summary of Design Plan specifications can be found on pages 25–27 of the study design. Students are strongly encouraged to use these specifications as part of their Design Plan language.

There must be a strong relationship between the Design Plan and the final product. Departures from or developments of some specific intentions are acceptable, as this mirrors professional practice. When these changes occur the plan should be annotated, detailing the reasons for the intended departure from the plan. Media Design Plans must be assessed by the teacher as S or N (satisfactory or not satisfactory) before students begin their productions. It is inappropriate for the Design Plan to be completed retrospectively, and students cannot be given credit for work done on the Design Plan once it has been submitted and assessed as satisfactory during Unit 3. One approach to avoid retrospective 'planning' is to initial and/or date stamp each page of the plan. Evaluative 'statements of outcome' are not part of this task, should not be included and are not subject to assessment.

**Production**

Information regarding the formats in which the Media production may be completed and the scope of task appropriate to each media form (including durations, number of pages and number of images) can be found on pages 24 and 35 of the *Media VCE Study Design* and on page 15 of Supplement 2 of the February 2007 *VCAA Bulletin VCE VET and VCAL* – the 2007 Advice for School Assessment. The designated formats and scopes of task must be complied with.

The length of the task is sufficient in each form to allow a student to complete an excellent production within a realistic timeframe. The tasks have been designed for equity of workload between media forms and in recognition of professional media practice where practitioners rarely choose the scope of their productions. In 2006, the review process again revealed some pieces of work that were overly long and others that were too brief. Works that exceeded the scope of task would invariably have been of higher quality with, for example, tighter editing and/or fewer pages or images.

Several works were submitted for Top Screen and Top Designs that exceeded the scope of task and therefore could not be included in the selection process. These works could have been improved if attention to the scope of task had been part of the production process.

The convergence of digital photography and print layout in recent years has continued, and students used this convergence effectively in the design and construction of productions that met their intentions for their designated audience. Students are encouraged to make firm decisions about the medium in which they are working early in the design process. The chosen medium should be determined largely by the choice of topic or subject matter, with other considerations being the availability of appropriate equipment and the student's level of familiarity with the various media formats under consideration.

## High-scoring work
### Production exercises
High-scoring students showed a clear understanding of the nature and purpose of the task in two clearly delineated Production exercises and demonstrated skill in the completion of each exercise together with a sound grasp of the Design Plan specifications explored and/or applied. There was clear evidence of the skills the student had employed to complete each exercise, together with evidence of the student's understanding of the possibilities and limitations of the equipment, applications and/or processes used. Documentation was clear and comprehensive for both exercises, and the evaluation was honest in its explanation of the extent to which the exercise realised the stated intention(s).

### Design Plan and product
High-scoring students:
- conceived, designed and executed their product with their intention and audience clearly in mind
- produced a Design Plan that clearly and succinctly worked through all the specifications relevant to their medium
- approached each stage of the production process in a planned and organised manner
- produced a product that exhibited appropriate knowledge and use of the conventions of the medium
- produced a product with individual and distinctive qualities that engaged its designated audience
- produced a product that made best use of the equipment available to the student in relation to the task being undertaken
- displayed a genuine connection between the Design Plan and the finished product, with deviations between the two clearly justified and annotated on the plan.

The subjects or topics of student productions were varied. Students are encouraged to choose topics, themes or situations with which they are familiar and then to approach these in creative and individual ways, choosing the media format that in their opinion best suits their exploration of the topic. High-quality student work was exhibited in each of the media formats (although sound production continues to be a neglected medium) and across a variety of genres or styles of presentation.

Students generally made appropriate use of advances in technology without losing sight of the need for technical proficiency to be matched by appropriate levels of individuality, management and organisation of the production process.

## SPECIFIC COMMENTS
### Criterion 1 – Use of media equipment, applications and/or processes to present ideas and/or achieve particular effects
Production exercises that were presented for review revealed that students who had been given simple and clear instructions to complete smaller tasks that were clearly differentiated from teaching and learning activities were generally more successful than students who were asked to make 'mini productions'. These students were better able to understand the purpose of the exercise and their documentation at all three stages of each exercise was of a higher quality. Mini productions or overly long tasks do not adequately focus students' attention on the requirements of the

outcomes of the study design task nor allow them to concentrate on specific Design Plan specifications in sufficient detail. Shorter, more specific tasks help students attend to the requirements of the task more effectively.

Separate documentation should be provided for each exercise, including those completed as planning tasks. Students should be encouraged to consider, for example, how the conventions of correct script formatting can convey information and be used to anticipate and solve production problems. They could evaluate the limitations of the scripting process and propose solutions to these limitations. Realisation documentation is not intended to be an opportunity for a discussion of the student's lack of ability, rather it should examine the extent to which the completed exercise conveys the intended ideas, explores the Design Plan specifications noted in the intention and, as appropriate, the possibilities and limitations of the equipment, applications and/or processes used.

**Criterion 2 – Development of a media production design plan**
Design Plans presented for review once again varied in the manner in which they were completed. These differences generally reflected those in professional media production design conventions, which vary according to factors including media form, intention, budget and time constraints.

There is no single correct method of designing a media production. An effective Design Plan should convey a full understanding of what the finished work will be like. It should contain both visual and written material that is directly relevant to the production. One test that might be applied to determine the efficacy of the plan is to ask 'Could this Design Plan be used by someone other than its creator to complete the production?' Aspects of some media productions may be planned in greater detail than others – students should make use of industry practice in these cases. For example, while it may not be possible to fully storyboard a documentary, it is possible to storyboard aspects of the production and to create a timeline that illustrates the various aspects of the topic that will be included in the final production. Similarly, interview questions and possible camera positions can be planned and proposed.

Some Design Plans continue to be presented in the form of workbooks or visual diaries that contained all of the student's work for the semester. This is not a recommended practice as students may experience difficulty in differentiating the relative importance of the specific Design Plan specifications from other teaching, learning and initial brainstorming activities. In particular, it was noted that some Design Plans contained an excessive number of pages that were devoted to 'research' or 'influences'. These pages tended to contain many cut and pasted images from magazines or of equipment that lacked real purpose or focus, contributed little to the students' intention and were often included at the expense of a detailed discussion of Design Plan specifications as required by the study design.

It is not necessary or desirable to alter Design Plans after their submission. Examples of unnecessary material included stills taken during the production process or the finished production and contact sheets or test prints. One way to overcome this temptation is for teachers to assess the Design Plan at the conclusion of Unit 3. This may serve as an incentive for students to ensure that the plan is fully formulated by this time and prevent students from editing or tidying it up for later. For discussion of appropriate annotations, see criterion 7.

It was pleasing to note that in 2006 there were fewer examples of students who planned for productions that they would not be able to realise for various reasons, including time, the availability of resources and/or a lack of appreciation of their skill level. These included designs for productions with very large casts by students whose plan and exercises indicated that they did not have the management skills required to realise such a proposal, and those by students who were attempting computer animation techniques for the first time. Of particular concern, however, are Design Plans for productions that involve dangerous activities, including the use of moving vehicles, weapons, illicit substances or other health and safety management issues. Teachers are advised of their duty of care and, should such representations be deemed integral to the production, the Design Plans should contain details of how health and safety considerations will be handled during production. Teachers are advised to monitor the development of students' Design Plans and guide them in planning for a production that can be realised given the resources available to them.

**Criterion 3 – Understanding of media form(s), conventions and style(s) appropriate to the media product**
Students have demonstrated increasing control of this aspect of the School-assessed Task over recent years, with the Design Plans and productions submitted for assessment in 2006 continuing to demonstrate an increased understanding of form, conventions and style appropriate to the intention of the production. This was evident in image and shot construction, and the selection of appropriate soundtracks, lighting, editing styles and rhythm.

Once again, attention is drawn to the need to advise students about the importance of age appropriate casting. Teenagers rarely make convincing gangsters, for example, and, depending on the intention of the work, such casting may not lend authenticity to the final production. In situations where students are unable to source appropriate actors they may be

better advised to consider changing their topic at the Design Plan stage. Appropriate casting is integral to the design process and may impact on this and other criteria.

### Criterion 4 – Development of an individual and/or distinctive product

Individuality and distinctiveness may be measured in many ways. Work that scored well on this criterion was highly accomplished and demonstrated effective communication throughout all aspects of the production. In these works, concepts, ideas, structure and skills coalesce to create a production that is an effective realisation of the design for the specified audience. These works may have dealt with original concepts or been very distinctive in the ways in which they used existing concepts, text types, styles or genres. Better works were distinguished by the depth and breadth of thought brought to each aspect of the production. The works revealed control and discipline in the execution of ideas and intention. Teachers and students looking for exemplars of individuality and distinctiveness will see these in the Top Designs and Top Screen exhibitions.

### Criterion 5 – Skill in the use of production equipment and/or facilities

This criterion refers to the production equipment and/or facilities available to the student and, while it is assessed on the production alone, the ability to make effective use of such equipment and/or facilities begins in preproduction. It is important that students plan for a production that can be realised given the equipment and/or facilities available to them.

It was pleasing to note the continued improvement in skill evident in video productions, especially in the areas of sound recording, audio mixing and colour matching. Better works demonstrated a sound grasp of the possibilities and limitations of equipment and/or facilities, often pushing the equipment to the maximum, yet not asking anything more than it was capable of. For example, video productions that were edited in a manner that did not draw attention to the technology but supported the plot and mood of the piece with the selection of effective transitions, therefore demonstrating appropriate rhythm and pace, scored better than works that showed rough or ill-timed editing, or contained unusual and distracting transitions.

In 2006 there was an increase in the number of print productions presented for review. This media form has demonstrated considerable growth in both popularity and skill development in recent years. Students demonstrated an understanding of design considerations appropriate to the genre of their production and made more effective use of the software available to them. Of particular note was the considered attention given to the selection of paper stock, although more thought needs to be directed to the possibilities and limitations of available printers.

Students continue to demonstrate the need for more skill development in the area of silver gelatin and digital photography. The decline in the popularity of silver gelatin photography has continued, accompanied by a decline in the skill base evident in these productions. Prints were too often out of focus, lacked tonal control and were marred by poor darkroom hygiene. Digital photography should be designed with a clear understanding of the printer and paper stock on which the finished work will be produced. Students should be encouraged to consider what the available equipment and/or facilities are capable of rather than focussing on a perceived lack of equipment or ignoring the strengths of what is available. The skills required for each stage of the production and the possibilities and limitations of all equipment and facilities to be used should be taught, as far as possible, during Outcome 2 in Unit 3. Thereafter these skills can become the focus of homework and private study activities.

One area of concern was the productions that were professionally printed. There are real skills involved in setting up digital images and print productions for a particular printer and the scope of task for these media forms acknowledges these skills by requiring students to print their own work. Students may not outsource any aspect of the printing process – to do so necessarily impacts on their assessment in criteria 5 and 6, which refer to the measurement of skill in the use of production equipment and understanding of the management and organisation of the production process.

### Criterion 6 – Understanding the management and organisation of the production process

This criterion is assessed on the evidence in the finished product of the student's management and organisation of each stage of the production process. Problems that occur early in the production tend to snowball at later stages. All students' skills vary at different stages and roles of media production and, to succeed in this criterion, students should be self aware and allow appropriate time for any stages where they anticipate they might have difficulties.

There were examples of productions for which the Design Plans were detailed and thorough but where the production process was less successful than the student had hoped due to inadequate time management or a lack of skill or equipment. The best works were evidence of well-developed individual production timelines that took into account the availability of equipment at each stage of the production process.

Common problems evident in this criterion continued to include insufficient footage or negatives to complete a quality production and insufficient time allowed for image manipulation, colour correction, printing and presentation. Students should be encouraged to undertake test shoots where possible, practise directing models and actors and allow time for shooting alternative camera angles, cut ins and cut aways. This extra material can be very useful in the editing suite or darkroom. Students working in photography and print should work to a strict timeline to allow for the same level of complexity and quality across all images and pages of their production.

**Criterion 7 – Realisation of the production Design Plan in the media product**
This criterion assesses the relationship between the Design Plan, as completed in Unit 3, and the production completed in Unit 4. The product is a realisation of this plan and should reveal extensive use of the plan. Work that scored highly on this criterion demonstrated use of the Design Plan as a working document. It is not necessary to exactly reproduce the plan to score highly, but to effectively realise it at all stages of the production process. It is neither necessary nor appropriate to decorate, rewrite, add to or reprint the Design Plan for assessment or to include details of the production and post production stages, including, for example, stills from the production, images of the cast and crew at work, negatives and test strips or draft prints. Although such work may be useful for teaching and learning, it cannot contribute to a student's marks for this criterion. The Design Plan is a working document and is not intended to be a demonstration of skills in presentation.

In the work presented for review there was, once again, a degree of retrospectivity evident in some Design Plans. Teachers should caution students that Design Plans that are completed after the production cannot be scored for this criterion and are invariably associated with products that would have been much better had the plan been completed during Outcome 3 in Unit 3 rather than at the conclusion of Outcome 1 in Unit 4. There are many strategies that can be employed to avoid students reworking their Design Plan. These include signing and/or dating each page on receipt of the plan, photocopying and retaining a copy of the plan or separating the teaching and learning workbook or visual diary from the Design Plan, thus making the plan a smaller and more focussed document. Teachers are often fearful that if they allow students to retain their Design Plans they may be lost; however, if the Design Plan is used as a working document essential for the completion of production and post production, then its loss is far less common than teachers imagine.

It is rare that a Media production will exactly reproduce the Design Plan, as a great deal of learning occurs throughout the production process. The Design Plan should be clearly annotated in a manner that differentiates the annotations from the original plan. Annotations are intended to document any changes to the plan and the reasons for these changes. Such annotation should be brief and may take the form of, for example, notes in the margin, post it notes, stickers or a point form list. The annotations should demonstrate the development of students' skills and knowledge during the production process. Well-annotated Design Plans usually allowed students to maximise their score on this criterion.