

Pseudonym: Alina

R: How long have you been teaching Media Studies?

T: I've been teaching since around 2010. I studied Media in English, and then went on to do a BA Hons in Media Production and Journalism.

R: Have you got a media-related graduate or postgraduate qualification?

T: Yes — I've got a degree in Media Production and Journalism.

R: What exam board(s) did you teach until the 2017 specification change?

T: I taught WJEC before the change. I found the coursework element less paperwork-intensive for students. They had four items per element, and while it required research and planning, it wasn't overloaded. I remember OCR being a bit vague in comparison — students ended up submitting pages and pages of work, which didn't really help.

R: Did you/your school also offer GCSE Media Studies, and how was it different?

T: We didn't do OCR GCSE. I didn't feel it equipped students particularly well, even though they had options to choose from. It made them feel successful, but I'm not sure it truly prepared them.

R: Why and how did you decide to set up the Facebook Teacher Sharing group?

T: I set it up when the new spec was being introduced. I was a one-person department — head of Media Studies and the only one teaching it — so I needed support. There were going to be new resources, sure, but buying everything was expensive, and I wanted to collaborate with other teachers to share the planning load for the new specification.

It wasn't something Eduqas asked for or supported directly — I just did it because I needed that network.

R: Were the other admins teachers you already knew?

T: No, not originally. One of them I now work with, but at the time I didn't know any of them personally. As the group grew, I asked if anyone wanted to help with admin and moderation — a few people stepped up, and they've been amazing. We've got a messenger group, and we pitch in as needed. It's not organised like shifts — it's just cooperative.

R: How has the group evolved since it was first set up?

T: It's grown far beyond what I expected — over 1,500 members now. I didn't think there were that many Eduqas Media teachers! But I think a lot of people switched to Eduqas

early because it was the first spec to get accredited, and they didn't want to risk going with a board that wasn't approved.

Sometimes it's overwhelming. People post things they shouldn't — advertising, copyrighted materials, etc. We've had to take those down, which upsets a few people who are trying to use the group for business. That's not what it's for.

R: What kind of relationship does the group have with Eduqas?

T: We've actually had Eduqas people join the group. One of their subject officers has messaged me via Facebook Messenger to clarify what can and can't be posted. They've never criticised us — if anything, they've been supportive. We added their rules to the group and have worked with them to make sure we're staying compliant.

R: What are the main reasons teachers join the Facebook group?

T: Two things: resources and support. People share schemes of work, lessons, and example materials. Others ask questions because, often, they're the only Media Studies teacher at their school — or they're not even a specialist. And Eduqas can be vague with the spec, especially early on. With no past papers or grade boundaries at the start, people needed guidance.

R: Have there been any specific challenges in running the group?

T: Yes. We had a shared Google Drive originally, and it was brilliant — people could upload, download, and edit resources. But it got out of hand. Documents were being edited, shared outside the group, and we couldn't manage it. Some people who hadn't agreed to the group rules were accessing materials.

So now it's read-only. People can upload resources directly to the Facebook group, but they can't edit the Drive anymore. We've talked about alternatives — like building a dedicated website — but that's a huge job. Some English teachers have done that, but we don't have the time right now.

R: Do you feel confident in delivering the new specification?

T: Not really — at least not when I was teaching A Level. I moved schools about a year ago and now only teach GCSE. When I taught the new A Level, it felt like a massive shift. The percentage of the exam increased, the number of set products was huge, and the time to teach it all was tight. I felt overwhelmed and didn't have the confidence. I felt like a guinea pig.

R: Do you think the new Media Studies course equips students for the future?

T: Yes and no. I really like the breadth of the content — students study a wide range of media forms and platforms. They've really enjoyed things like radio and The Archers, which surprised me. It's opened their eyes to the influence of media.

But there's just too much content, and it's hard to balance theory and practical work. I'm lucky to work at a school that delivers GCSE over three years, but even then it feels rushed. I'd love more time to embed practical skills and interleave learning more effectively.

R: What are your thoughts on the coursework component?

T: I like that we still have coursework, but the mark scheme is very tick-box heavy. There's less room for genuine creativity. For example, I had a student design a DVD cover using different images — and technically that wasn't allowed. Someone could be amazing at Photoshop but won't get credit for that if it doesn't match the brief exactly. So that's frustrating.

R: If you could change anything about the specification, what would it be?

T: Definitely reduce the number of theories students are expected to learn at A Level. Honestly, some of the theory content is at undergraduate level. I hadn't even studied some of it at university. It's a lot to ask of 16–18-year-olds — and of teachers.

R: Did your school change its curriculum offer in response to the new specs?

Yes. We decided not to offer A Level Media this year and instead looked into vocational options. We considered Eduqas's vocational course but ended up sticking with the GCSE for now — I'd already put a lot into planning for it, and we wanted to see how the first results went. But the vocational specs are becoming just as content-heavy.

R: How do you feel about Eduqas as an exam board?

T: I've always had positive experiences with them. Whenever we've had to communicate — even when they've contacted me about content shared on Facebook — it's been constructive. Unlike my experience with OCR, Eduqas have always responded well to questions and concerns.

R: Have you used anything else to support your teaching besides the Facebook group?

T: Not really — we try to avoid paid resources where possible. Schools don't have much money, and teachers don't have much time. There are good free resources out there, and some brilliant people in the Facebook group who are generous with what they share. That's the culture we're trying to encourage.

R: T: Any final thoughts on Media Studies as a qualification or its future?

Just that the expectations — especially at A Level — are very high. It's overwhelming for teachers and students. There's a lot of great content, but the volume and complexity of theory, combined with the assessment structure, make it a tough subject to deliver. But there's also a strong community of teachers doing their best — and I think that matters.

Pseudonym: Lily

Response via email

1. How long have you been teaching Media Studies?

8 years.

2. Have you got a media-related graduate or postgraduate qualification?

Yes — I have a BA Hons in Media Production from Lincoln University.

3. What exam board(s) did you teach until the 2017 specification change?

OCR for GCSE and WJEC for A Level.

Social Media

1. When and why did you decide to join the Teacher Sharing Facebook group?

I searched for support and found the group. I now help Alice and the others manage it. It has been a fantastic resource and a massive support for teachers across the country.

2. What are the main ways you use the group?

Mainly for reassurance and to share resources. I've found it hugely beneficial as a sounding board.

3. What kinds of posts on the group would be more likely to make you comment?

As an admin, I deal with breaches and moderation. In terms of content and spec, I like to help answer questions. I don't engage with the more negative comments — I don't find that helpful.

4. How has being a member of the group helped you in your teaching? Any specific ways?

The group has helped with resource use and planning timescales — particularly knowing how much detail to go into for different areas. On more than one occasion, I've been able to correct or improve something I might have missed, thanks to others sharing their experience.

5. Have you used anything else to support your teaching?

Yes — I use Media Magazine, Eduqas's digital resources, and some key textbooks. As a department, we've tried to attend as many Eduqas CPD days as funding allows, but we haven't managed all of them due to cost.

Teaching and Delivery of the New A Level

1. Did/do you feel confident in delivering the new specification?

I feel more confident as time goes on, but I've found the time constraints really hard to manage with the amount of content.

2. Are there any aspects of the new specification you particularly like or dislike?

I like the increased rigour and wider range of texts — OCR was awful by comparison! That said, some of the historical texts are misjudged and difficult for students to engage with.

3. Have you had to change the way you teach since the introduction of the new specification?

Yes — it forced me to revisit the structure of my lessons and manage time more carefully.

4. What do you think your students have liked or disliked about the course so far?

They enjoyed the film marketing topic and really liked the NEA — it's massively improved. But they've struggled with the amount of information and have felt frustrated that not all areas they study will be examined.

5. If you taught the old specification, do you think the new Media A Level equips students with a better/worse/same understanding of the media than before?

Definitely better — it gives them a wider understanding across more areas.

6. If you could change anything about the specification, what would it/they be?

I'd reduce the number of set products and take a different approach to the newspapers.

Curriculum Reform

1. What were your initial thoughts and feelings about Media Studies when the A Level curriculum reforms were announced?

I was worried that the subject wouldn't survive the changes. I was also unsure about how heavy the historical content would be.

2. What were your initial thoughts when you first saw the new specifications?

My first thought was: How the hell are we going to get through all of that?!

Curriculum Offer

1. Did you/your school decide to change how Media Studies was offered when the new specification came in?

Yes — we've become stricter about entry to A Level Media. We now require a higher level of literacy at GCSE.

2. Do you/your school also offer Film Studies at A Level? If so, are students allowed to do both Media and Film together?

Yes, and yes. The new course structure allows that to work much better now that they're more clearly separated.

3. Why did you choose to go with the exam board you are with?

I like Eduqas and feel they work hard to support teachers. I appreciated the communication from WJEC with the old spec and wanted consistency across GCSE and

A Level. Also, they were the first board to get their new specs approved, which felt reassuring.

4. How do you feel about the support the exam board has offered since the start of the new specification?

I think they're working hard. That said, the Film Studies team communicates more effectively, and the Film course overall feels better organised than Media.

Pseudonym: Pritesh

How long have you been teaching Media Studies?

I've been teaching Media for quite a while now — I inherited some pretty big classes when I first started. At one point, we had six A-Level groups across Years 12 and 13, with about 70 students in Year 12 alone. Numbers have fluctuated since. Currently, I've got 23 in Year 13 and 32 in Year 12.

Have you got a media-related graduate or postgraduate qualification?

Yes, I went to university — studied Media formally — though we didn't go deep into the kind of theories A-Level students are expected to know now. It's a big leap compared to what I did.

What exam board(s) did you teach until the 2017 specification change?

I taught the legacy spec for several years and saw the shift to the current Eduqas specification. I also attended a launch event for AQA when they were trying to get accredited, and it was chaos — they didn't have anything formalised. Eduqas, in contrast, had their act together early, which is why we went with them.

If teaching before 2017, what did you like/dislike about the old specs?

I liked how much more relevant and flexible the old specs were. You could tailor coursework; there was a choice between print and moving image. The current coursework is very rigid — scripted to the point where it limits creativity. Before, you could say: here's a brief, now make something meaningful. Now it's "create a DVD cover with these components," even if that's not how media works anymore.

What were your initial thoughts and feelings about Media Studies when the A Level curriculum reforms were announced?

To be honest, I thought they were trying to kill the subject. I went to the consultations and expected Media to be scrapped. I was shocked we kept any coursework at all — 30% is a blessing, but it's a far cry from what it used to be. There was definitely a political motive behind the changes.

Have these thoughts and feelings changed since you have started teaching the new specification?

Not really. I still don't see the relevance of most of what we're teaching now. The students say it, my colleagues say it. I mean, 1960s Vogue magazines? What's the point? Media is supposed to be a contemporary social science. This spec doesn't feel contemporary at all.

What were your initial thoughts when you first saw the new specifications?

Confusion. Overwhelm. The theories were dense, and there was no clear guidance at first. It felt rushed and politically motivated. The spec seemed designed to alienate students and teachers alike — which is tragic because Media Studies is such an important subject.

Do you feel confident in delivering the new specification?

Honestly? No. I'm becoming more confident, but I still feel like I don't know what I'm doing half the time. I taught the old spec for eight or nine years. This feels like a totally different subject. I'm just hoping that when we get the first full set of exam results, I'll feel like I know where we stand.

Are there any aspects of the new specification you particularly like or dislike?

Dislike: almost everything about the lack of flexibility. The coursework is scripted. The content is outdated. And it's very theoretical, which turns students off.

Like: I guess... we still have coursework. Barely.

Have you had to change the way you teach since the introduction of the new specification?

Completely. The number of set texts, the depth of theory — it's all been a massive shift. And we don't have the resources to keep up. I've got no cameras, hardly any equipment — one half-functioning tripod — and students are expected to make audio-visual products. It's a joke.

What do you think your students have liked or disliked about the course so far?

They're frustrated. They don't see the relevance of what they're learning. Trying to get them to engage with The Archers or BBC Radio 4 is completely out of their comfort zone. It's hard to sell the subject when it's not speaking to their lives.

That said, I still try to sell the coursework side. I tell them, "If you want creativity and a practical element, this is your subject." That's kept some interest going.

Do you think the new Media A Level equips students with a better/worse/same understanding of the media than before?

Worse. Definitely. It's so academic now, it barely relates to real-world media or media industries. If students want to go into the media, this A-Level won't help them much — unless they're heading into a very academic media studies degree.

If you could change anything about the specification, what would it/they be?

I'd bring back flexibility — more creative coursework, more current media texts. I'd scrap some of the theory or at least teach it at a later stage. And I'd stop pretending this is how students learn best — because it's not.

When and why did you decide to join the Teacher Sharing Facebook group?

I heard about it during a training session — not sure if it was from a course leader or a colleague. But I joined because I couldn't do it all alone. Making resources, understanding the spec — I needed a place to discuss things with other teachers and share materials.

What are the main ways you use the group?

Mostly for resources and advice. As the course developed, the quality of resources has improved — people are getting their heads around the spec. The group's been great for sharing that expertise.

What kinds of posts on the group would be more likely to make you comment?

I'm more of a passive member. I read a lot but don't comment as much. I like to see what others are saying, especially when something's changed — like new interpretations or clarification from Eduqas. But I don't post a lot myself.

How has being a member of the group helped you in your teaching?

Massively. We've got no money for resources — couldn't even buy toilet paper last year. So being able to download things from the group has been essential. There's no time for subject-specific CPD at school, so the group fills that gap. It's CPD by teachers, for teachers.

Have you used anything else to support your teaching?

Yes, I downloaded everything I could from Eduqas as soon as it came out. We bought the Illuminate Year One textbook, but haven't had budget for the Year Two one. Most of our support comes from the Facebook group and what I can scrape together online.

Did/does your school offer vocational alternatives to Media A Level?

We're an academy with an 11–18 intake. I've delivered Level 2 media qualifications before — like a GCSE equivalent — but that was under the old spec. They gave me six or seven hours across two weeks while students were retaking English and Maths. It wasn't ideal. We tried to make it engaging — TV news was the topic — but the constraints were tough.

Do you think the new course has affected student recruitment or engagement?

Yes, and no. I still sell the course on its creative aspects — even though there's less of that now. But the shift to a more academic model has definitely made it harder to get some students on board. If we lose any more of the coursework, I think engagement will really drop.

Anything else you'd like to say about the course or Media Studies more broadly?

Just that this isn't the Media Studies I grew up teaching. The theories students are expected to learn are university-level. Some I hadn't even heard of before. The subject has become unrecognisable — rigid, outdated, and disconnected from students' lived experiences.

I know David Buckingham and Len Masterman were brought in as consultants and didn't agree with the DfE's direction. That tells you everything. The subject's potential is huge — but it's being undermined. And it's turning people off.

Pseudonym: Sarah

How long have you been teaching Media Studies?

Twelve years.

Have you got a media-related graduate or postgraduate qualification?

Yes, I did my degree in Film, Broadcasting and Journalism, and my Master's at Bournemouth.

What exam board(s) did you teach until the 2017 specification change?

I taught AQA before switching to Eduqas. I didn't teach WJEC.

When and why did you decide to join the Teacher Sharing Facebook group?

Pretty early on — around 2017, I think. As soon as I heard about the new spec, really. It felt like a good space for teachers to share ideas and questions. Because Eduqas was the first spec that got approved, people could start talking about it straight away, whereas with the others, it took longer.

What are the main ways you use the group?

Mainly just to look at resources and see what people are doing for various topics. It's been really good recently when people have shared example essays — just to do a bit of self-moderation, really. Like, okay, they think that's a Band 5 — why? Does that match what I'd expect?

What kinds of posts on the group would be more likely to make you comment?

If I think I can help, I'll try and do that. Or if someone's posted something useful, I'll add to that conversation. I don't always reply to the more general "who's enjoyed teaching this?" sort of posts — I'm more likely to respond to specific questions or posts where someone needs help.

How has being a member of the group helped you in your teaching?

It's definitely helped — for example, someone posted about the media language question in Component 1. I'd assumed students would get an audio-visual clip three times, but it's actually twice. That wasn't clearly stated in the official materials — someone had discussed it after a training session, and I wouldn't have known otherwise. So, yeah, it's been useful for catching things like that.

Have you used anything else to support your teaching?

Not subscriptions, no. But I do use the Eduqas website and their resources — especially their digital stuff. I bought the textbooks, but they've been a bit confusing, especially

with the AS and Year 1 split, since we don't do AS. I've never really been a huge textbook person anyway.

Did you get given any subject-specific time to prepare for the new specification?

Not specifically — it was the summer term when it was all happening, so I had a bit of gained time to use. But there wasn't any officially allocated time for it. Media was one of the last subjects to go through the reform process, so most schools were already doing that kind of prep.

Did you attend any CPD or training?

Yes. My colleague went to one of the Eduqas courses in July 2017, and I went to one more recently, in October 2018.

Did/do you feel confident in delivering the new specification?

Well, I was actually on maternity leave when it first launched, so my colleagues delivered it in that first year. They found it quite difficult at the start — not knowing what the assessments would look like, for example.

I came back in July 2018, and by then we had a lot more information. I feel pretty secure with it now, and so do my colleagues. But there have definitely been times when we thought we understood something, and then realised we'd got it wrong. That's difficult for students — you want them to feel confident, and it's not nice to have to say, "Actually, what I told you isn't quite right."

Are there any aspects of the new specification you particularly like or dislike?

What I really don't like is the unpredictability of the question formats and marks. For Component 1, Section B, you don't know how many marks questions will be. And in Component 2, it could be 2x15 or 1x30, or a 10 and a 20. Eduqas said this was down to Ofqual, and I believe them — but it still makes planning and preparation harder compared to other subjects.

I do like that Component 1 still has an unseen element. It's good to bring in other texts. And I think the focus on context is much better now — it gives students a broader understanding of the media.

Have you had to change the way you teach since the introduction of the new specification?

Definitely. The amount of content per text is huge, and that's been hard. It takes much longer to plan, especially making sure I understand everything fully before teaching. I think next year will be easier now I've done it once, but yeah, it's been a slog.

What do you think your students have liked or disliked about the course so far?

The good thing is they don't have anything to compare it to — so they generally go along with it if we're enthusiastic. Some topics, though, just haven't interested them.

Zoella was a good example — they tolerated it at first but eventually got bored. It just dragged on. And it wasn't my favourite to teach either. But they enjoyed *Life on Mars* and *The Bridge*. I like teaching *The Bridge*, so that helped. Social media is important, but Zoella just feels like a strange choice.

Do you have any opinions about the set texts themselves?

I find it frustrating. Media changes all the time, and before, I'd rarely teach the same thing more than twice. Now, I look ahead and think, "Am I really going to still be teaching Zoella in five years?" Even *Life on Mars* feels outdated — enjoyable, sure, but hardly contemporary.

Do you think the new Media A Level equips students with a better/worse/same understanding of the media than before?

I don't think it does enough. Especially with the unseen element — you're limited to music video, advertising, and newspapers. There are loads of brilliant, relevant media texts I'd love to use — like *Killing Eve* — but I can't find a space for them in the spec. That's a shame.

If you could change anything about the specification, what would it/they be?

I'd like the set texts to be updated every two years. And simplify Component 1 — it's strange how you've got texts in Section A but not B, and the newspaper industry and audience stuff is confusing. Just make it consistent. That would help a lot.

Did you/your school decide to change how Media Studies was offered when the new specification came in?

No, we were really lucky — our numbers have stayed strong. We've got 40 students in Year 12 this year, split into two groups. As long as we keep selling the subject the same way, I think that'll continue.

Some students who were more interested in the production side might be put off by the reduction in coursework, but overall it's been fine. It helps that we're a grammar school, so we've got students who also enjoy the academic side.

Do you/your school also offer Film Studies at A Level?

We tried to before and had it for a while, but uptake wasn't great. It's a shame, because it was nice to cover film within Media. Now we can't really do that anymore. Even for the unseen part, it would be great to use an opening sequence or trailer — but we can't.

Do you offer a BTEC alongside A Level Media?

No — where I used to work we did more of that, but here we just run the A Level.

Have you found ways of adding any extra practical work in?

Yes. Every term, I try and include some practical work. Term 1 we did an advert, Term 2 was newspapers, and they've just done a music video remake. This term, I'm giving them a brief from the sample coursework and asking for a 30–45 second clip. It helps break up all the analysis, and builds their skills for the NEA.

What is the entry requirement for the course in terms of GCSE English?

Ideally a grade 6, but we sometimes accept a 5. Not really below that.

Any concerns about assessment and lower-attaining students?

Yes, I do worry. The exam's a bit of an unknown, and that makes me nervous — especially for weaker students. The theory and evaluation parts are going to be tough for them. We'll see how they do, but I am concerned.

Transcription pseudonym: SEAMUS

How long have you been teaching Media Studies?

Oh, God, it must be... well over 20 years now. I mean, I used to run the faculty where I'm part-time now. So, yeah, quite a long time — though I've sort of embraced a more flexible lifestyle recently.

Have you got a media-related graduate or postgraduate qualification?

Yeah, so I did my PGCE at Greenwich University, and it was media and communications — I think it was one of the few where media was part of the specialism. Before that, my degree was in Drama and English, funny enough. So I taught a lot of Drama too, which actually marries quite nicely with Media. More so, I think, than English alone.

What exam board(s) did you teach until the 2017 specification change?

I was teaching AQA back then. I mean, we were one of the biggest centres for A-Level Media at the time, so I got dragged into all the spec consultations... unofficially. Honestly, the consultations were a farce — you'd get someone from the government just silently taking notes and Eduqas people trying to railroad decisions through. But yeah, we were with AQA until the change.

If teaching before 2017, what did you like/dislike about the old specs?

I liked the modularity — the idea that you could bank an AS grade and resit. Students understood that. This new linear setup? No clue. You've got people in leadership who still think in modular terms, and they just don't get it.

The old specs let students get involved practically — real coursework with meaning. You could see their progress. You'd finish an activity, and then watch it together. There was a sense of completion, and if you had a good group, you got some really good work.

There were issues too, obviously. The critical research paper, that was a nightmare. It was academic-heavy, quite inaccessible for most, and not really equitable. Kids would spend months on primary research, interview someone famous — and still end up with a U grade. It was soul-destroying.

What were your initial thoughts and feelings about Media Studies when the A Level curriculum reforms were announced?

I hoped I wouldn't have to teach the new spec, to be honest! I went off to Brighton when it first hit, but of course, came back and had to teach it. My initial thoughts? That they were trying to kill the subject. Everything about it seemed designed to make it less engaging for students and harder to teach well.

Have these thoughts and feelings changed since you have started teaching the new specification?

Not really. If anything, I've become more frustrated. There's a lot of lip service to skills and creativity, but it's all very prescribed. And the spec is so packed with stuff that doesn't resonate with students.

What were your initial thoughts when you first saw the new specifications?

I thought it was a joke. Like, honestly — when I saw the MTV CSP and the demographic it was aimed at — 30 to 49 year olds? Absurd. The print options were dull, the music video choices were bizarre. It felt like the people putting this together hadn't set foot in a classroom in 10 years.

Did you/your school decide to change how Media Studies was offered when the new specification came in?

Well, I wasn't full-time by then, but yes, there were changes. Fewer students, fewer classes — mostly because the subject had been made harder to access. The NEA became a problem. Not in terms of the work itself, but in terms of the flexibility that had been stripped away.

Do you/your school also offer Film Studies at A Level? If so, are students allowed to do both Media and Film together?

Yeah, they can. We've got both, and some students do both. But timetabling is tricky, and not everyone sees the value in offering both now. Media used to be a great complement — now it's seen as the harder sell.

Why did you choose to go with the exam board you are with?

Honestly? We didn't have much choice. Eduqas had the most coherent offer in a landscape of terrible ones. But it wasn't because we loved it. It was just the best of a bad bunch.

How do you feel about the support the exam board has offered since the start of the new specification?

Mixed. There are some good people, like Mark Redman — he knows what he's doing. But overall, the support has been inconsistent. And the textbooks? Dreadful. Full of mistakes, very prescriptive, clearly written for a grammar school audience. Just not fit for purpose.

Did/do you feel confident in delivering the new specification?

Not at first. I don't think anyone did. There's so much content, and the NEA is so inflexible. You've got to be incredibly confident just to interpret it in a way that still works for your students. I've found my feet with it now, but it's not a spec I'd choose.

Are there any aspects of the new specification you particularly like or dislike?

Dislike? Most of it. The CSPs don't always land, and the set texts can be totally alien to the students. Also, the NEA is way too prescriptive. I did like some of the music video work — when students get into it, they can produce really exciting stuff. But it's all uphill.

Have you had to change the way you teach since the introduction of the new specification?

Yes. Completely. More front-loaded content, more theory earlier on. It's a slog. I used to be able to teach with more flexibility, allow creativity to build — now it's like cramming a university course into a sixth form timetable.

What do you think your students have liked or disliked about the course so far?
They hate the textbook. They struggle with the CSPs. They like the practical work — when they get to do it. And they like it when we connect content to real debates, real media culture. But overall, they don't find it engaging in the way the old course was.

If you taught the old specification, do you think the new Media A Level equips students with a better/worse/same understanding of the media than before?
Worse. Absolutely. It's too fragmented. Too theoretical too early. And the exam structure doesn't reflect how people actually engage with media. It doesn't prepare them for university or work — not the way it used to.

If you could change anything about the specification, what would it/they be?
I'd bring back the flexibility — let students pursue more meaningful, personal NEAs. Change the CSPs to be more representative and current. And overhaul the assessment. Some of the questions are just ridiculous — like focusing on one theorist and one media text for a 25-mark question. That's not analysis; that's trivia.

When and why did you decide to join the Teacher Sharing Facebook group?
I joined a while back, partly out of desperation! I wanted to see how others were handling this awful spec. And actually, it's been really helpful. Seeing how people break down the CSPs or share resources — that's invaluable.

What are the main ways you use the group?
I look at how others are teaching specific CSPs. Sometimes I post when I find something useful — like a good article or clip. Other times I just browse. Yesterday someone posted a debate with David Lammy — that's gold for teaching representation.

What kinds of posts on the group would be more likely to make you comment?
When someone shares a new angle on a CSP or highlights a problem with the spec. Or when there's something really wrong — like people misunderstanding the NEA or the theory. I try to help clear that up.

How has being a member of the group helped you in your teaching? Any specific ways?
Definitely. It's helped me feel less alone with it all. And it's made me a better planner. I've picked up practical ideas, alternative readings, and even just reassurance that we're all finding it hard. The Google Drive that someone linked to — that's a lifeline.

Have you used anything else to support your teaching?
Yeah — Eduqas resources (though I take them with a pinch of salt), textbook (again, very critically), and CPD when I can get it. Also used to attend NEA meetings and the occasional BFI day. I keep in touch with other teachers too, some of whom were my students and now run their own departments. That network helps a lot.

Research Transcript - Pseudonym: Ben

Q: How long have you been teaching Media Studies?

This is now my eighth year of teaching Media, and I've been Head of Media for five years.

Q: Have you got a media-related graduate or postgraduate qualification?

Yes, I did a joint honours degree, majoring in Media with Drama at Saint Mary's University, and then I completed a subject-specific Media PGCE at Sunderland University.

Q: What exam board(s) did you teach until the 2017 specification change?

When I did my NQT year, I taught Film Studies with WJEC, but I'd never taught Eduqas until last year. Before that, I taught AQA at both GCSE and A Level.

Curriculum Reform

Q: What were your initial thoughts and feelings about Media Studies when the A Level curriculum reforms were announced?

I was initially very loyal to AQA—it felt like the natural choice. But when the new specifications were so delayed, I had to rethink. Eduqas seemed like the better-prepared board, and I thought their resources at the start were fantastic.

Q: Have these thoughts and feelings changed since you started teaching the new specification?

Yes and no. I still think Eduqas has strengths—particularly in terms of their set texts—but the demands of the new spec are really tough when you're working in isolation. I'm the only Media specialist in my school, with five non-specialists teaching Media as a second or third subject. That creates a lot of pressure.

Q: What were your initial thoughts when you first saw the new specifications?

Honestly, I found it overwhelming. I was suddenly having to teach five variations of two different specs, including the legacy ones and the new Eduqas version. The planning workload was enormous.

Curriculum Offer

Q: Did you/your school decide to change how Media Studies was offered when the new specification came in?

Not really, though the course structure shifted a bit. Because of AQA's delays, we ended up delivering Media over two years instead of three for one cohort.

Q: Do you/your school also offer Film Studies at A Level? If so, are students allowed to do both Media and Film together?

We don't currently offer Film Studies alongside Media at A Level.

Q: Why did you choose to go with the exam board you are with?

Mainly because AQA didn't release their spec on time. Eduqas seemed more organised and had good resources to start with.

Q: How do you feel about the support the exam board has offered since the start of the new specification?

I think the support has been okay, but I've relied much more on peer networks like the Facebook group. Eduqas materials are useful but they can be limiting, especially when you're trying to create engaging and high-quality lessons independently.

Teaching and Delivery of the New A Level

Q: Did/do you feel confident in delivering the new specification?

Yes, I feel confident. For the first time in my teaching career, we've got fixed set texts and a clearer exam structure. That gives a degree of certainty. My confidence is strongest in teaching theory and creating resources.

Q: Are there any aspects of the new specification you particularly like or dislike?

I love the variety of media forms—radio, gaming, TV, etc.—and how it encourages students to explore beyond traditional texts. But I really dislike the coursework requirements. The demand for original images is overly prescriptive, especially for students who want to replicate something like Vogue. They end up having to be artificially creative to meet the eight-image minimum.

Q: Have you had to change the way you teach since the introduction of the new specification?

Absolutely. I've had to "idiot-proof" resources for non-specialists teaching Media. Every lesson has to be planned meticulously, with digital access, links, and notes to guide them through. It's made me more organised but also more exhausted.

Q: What do you think your students have liked or disliked about the course so far?

They've really enjoyed the TV unit—especially Life on Mars, which is one of my favourites too. Surprisingly, they also liked the gaming content, even the girls, which defied my expectations. They're not fans of Late Night Woman's Hour, though. That's a struggle. They've also found the cross-form exam structure confusing—like trying to figure out which aspects belong in Section A vs. Section B.

Q: If you taught the old specification, do you think the new Media A Level equips students with a better/worse/same understanding of the media than before?

I think it's better in some ways—more structured and theory-driven. But there's a danger it's becoming too rigid. We're teaching to a set format now, rather than fostering wider critical thinking.

Q: If you could change anything about the specification, what would it/they be?

Definitely the coursework. The restrictions are stifling. Students can't include even a patterned background unless it's their own image. I've had cases where students produced

amazing original work and then had to sneak in a minor edited image and hope for leniency. That kind of policing feels unnecessary and demoralising.

Resources, Support and CPD

Q: When and why did you decide to join the Teacher Sharing Facebook group?

I joined because I missed having a subject community. In my previous school, we had a proper Media department and we'd talk shop all the time. I lost that in my current school, and the Facebook group became a lifeline—somewhere to talk, share, vent, and get advice.

Q: What are the main ways you use the group?

I mostly follow conversations. I do post and upload occasionally, though I upload more on TES than Facebook. I use it to check ideas, get resources for unseen texts, and read threads—especially on tricky topics like postmodernism.

Q: What kinds of posts on the group would be more likely to make you comment?

Anything on theory or application, especially when someone brings up something I hadn't considered. I commented recently on a post about *The Bridge* and how to teach postmodernism in that context.

Q: How has being a member of the group helped you in your teaching? Any specific ways?

It's helped massively. For instance, I found a fantastic postmodernism thread when teaching *The Bridge*, which helped me build student understanding. And I love Becky Fisher's content—my students do too.

Q: Have you used anything else to support your teaching?

Yes. I use Media Magazine, Becky Fisher's YouTube channel, and occasionally ZigZag papers. I also like Media Insider's YouTube content—his Steve Neale video is excellent. My students also form their own support networks like WhatsApp groups, and one even made a Snapchat list with theorist names—Stuart Hall, Laura Mulvey, Baudrillard—it was brilliant.