



## Course Report 2015

Subject	Media
Level	Higher (new)

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment and marking instructions for the examination.

## Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

### Component 1: Question paper

The question paper performed as expected, with candidates achieving consistently across all parts of each question.

### Component 2: Assignment

The average mark in the assignment was lower than anticipated. Grade boundary decisions addressed this by making an adjustment of one mark against each of the Section 1: Planning questions — 5 marks in total. This benefited those whose responses detailed evidence of having compiled a research and planning portfolio (task 2) but who did not make the relationships between these clear (task 3).

## Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

### Component 1: Question paper

An interesting variety of media content was used to respond to the questions and exemplify concepts and ideas.

In **Q1: Media Content in Context**, the most common types of text referenced were mainstream films, documentaries and advertisements. These worked well for a range of abilities. The clear genre markers, narratives and conventional uses of media codes that tend to be found in such content meant that C-pass candidates could access and apply concepts in a straightforward way that allowed them to demonstrate competence in the skills, knowledge and understanding assessed in this question. More able candidates were able to access deeper levels of signification and discuss the complex interrelationships between content and contexts in more sophisticated ways, thereby achieving the highest marks.

For **Q2: Role of Media**, some candidates discussed the question in a broad way, making references to various media organisations and content to exemplify their information or substantiate their arguments. Others based their answer on one text only and used this to apply their understanding of the question. There were many responses on purposes in advertising, and in the press. Where responses clearly addressed the terms of the question, any of these approaches proved appropriate, and there were many excellent responses. However, many weaker responses were characterised by what seemed to be the production of a learned response, with little attempt to adapt knowledge to the terms of the question.

Many candidates showed knowledge of media theory and, in particular, uses and gratifications and media effects theories. Knowledge of such theories is not a specific requirement of the course, but some candidates used them to frame or enhance their answers. Others, however, seemed unable to adapt their knowledge of theories to the broad

terms of the question and simply produced a pre-prepared response that could not be well-rewarded by the marking instructions.

As anticipated, candidates approached the questions in one of two ways:

- ◆ producing a single response covering and integrating all parts of the question
- ◆ producing a separate response to each part of the question

For both Media Content in Context Q1 and Role of Media Q2, splitting the questions into parts is designed to provide support and direction to help candidates address all the required aspects of the answer. Markers consider the response as a whole and credit valid information to each part of the question wherever it is found. In general, many candidates did better when they used the separate a/b/c approach to Q1, and an integrated response approach to Q2.

This may be because of the nature of the questions. The a/b/c split in Q1 is to direct the candidates towards analysing specific key aspects and their relationship with a particular context, and so a separated approach can work well. Markers reported that, in general, those who took this approach covered each part of the question in more detail than those who produced integrated responses, where attention to individual parts of the question was often weaker.

By contrast, the split in Q2 is to direct the candidates towards producing discussion that is relevant to the question, with any appropriate supporting evidence, and so an integrated approach may be more logical for many. Candidates taking this approach were often able, effectively, to make points relevant to the question and back up these with detailed evidence.

Some candidates responded to each question with reference to one media text only; others used two or more texts in their answers. Again, a full range of marks was awarded in relation to both approaches and no one approach is preferred. Whether using one text or several, many candidates demonstrated insightful understanding of the relationship between media content and contexts, and interesting engagement with role of media issues and perspectives.

Where more than one media text was used for a question, this was most successful where the references were made *throughout* the response, rather than by using a completely different example in relation to each *part* of the question. In Q1, the a/b/c split is designed to support the candidates through the question but each part relates to the others. So, using new content in part c in particular, where candidates were asked to '*analyse how different audiences might respond to the media content you have referenced*' meant that some found it difficult to answer the question and gain the highest marks. In Q2, part b is an instruction to provide evidence for the discussion produced part a; where new content was referenced for b, it was not always used to do this.

## **Component 2: Assignment**

A great variety of media content was produced. There were some excellent short films and adverts in particular, and evidence of considerable effort to engage meaningfully with the tasks in the Assignment to plan and develop interesting and creative content.

Where centres issued the Assignment as set out in the assessment task document, candidates had clear task parameters to follow. The Assignment rewards active engagement with and reflection on production processes, and the sequencing of tasks is designed to enable this. For the written part, many were able to gain the highest marks by taking a very practical approach to ensuring that they made the required number and type of points that are rewarded by the marking scheme (available on SQA's website). Some centres issued workbooks and production logs to help their candidates keep track of research and decisions, and these worked particularly well where they incorporated the specific wording of the assessment task document, and in particular the questions to be answered and submitted.

A number of centres did not use the tasks as given, or used tasks for National 5, which has a similar structure, but different requirements for each of the tasks. Other centres submitted Unit evidence, which does not assess the added value represented by the Assignment, or a mixture of Unit and Assignment evidence. Candidates can only be assessed against the Assignment tasks and the published marking instructions — it was sometimes difficult to locate valid information that could be assigned marks where the evidence submitted did not clearly correlate with the tasks.

A mixture of individual and groupwork briefs were set or negotiated, and there was evidence to suggest that the parameters of these had some impact on the ability of candidates to complete all parts of the assignment effectively.

It was apparent that candidates with briefs to plan and develop content that was short and quite clearly defined in scope had undertaken a manageable and focused amount of work. The submissions from many such candidates suggested that they had been able to compile a solid portfolio of research and planning, and had worked methodically through the development processes; they were then able to complete the written parts of the assignment in a straightforward manner. Such briefs included those to produce a single page or 30-second advert, a three- to five-minute moving image piece or three to four pages of print or web-based content. They worked well where purpose(s) and target audience(s) were clearly identified, and where institutional factors gave clear constraints or opportunities that candidates could work within and reference.

Submissions based on briefs to plan and develop longer pieces sometimes indicated that there was an inordinate amount of planning and research done, and the production process was either very lengthy or had to be compressed into a very short time, affecting the intended shape or quality of the finished piece. This was particularly the case with briefs to plan and develop films of eight to ten minutes or more. Some candidates in this position seemed to lose track of the reasons behind specific planning decisions, or tended mainly to describe the final product and the challenges faced making it. That said, this was not always the case, and there were some excellent assignments in response to this type of brief.

As expected, there was a mixture of briefs to plan and develop media content either individually or in collaboration with others. Where candidates were working individually, or where they had individual responsibility for a discrete part of a collaborative production, they seemed better able to complete all the tasks in the assignment. By having full control over research and decisions relevant to their content, such candidates had plenty to write and reflect upon, and were able to clearly convey their active engagement with the assignment.

Many candidates working as part of a larger group benefited from collaborative production processes and had a positive experience reflective of professional practice. Such projects worked best where there were clearly defined responsibilities and where individual candidates planned and developed a specific part of the content themselves, even where they had collaborated on some group decisions such as house styles or narrative structure. Sometimes, group projects seemed overly ambitious for the time and resources available, and there was a tendency to specify an extremely lengthy piece for a group project, which sometimes led to the issues outlined above.

Other candidates had briefs which did not specify that *finished* media content had to be made, and produced storyboards, scripts, hand-sketched poster drafts, page mock-ups, or some other pre-production material. This generally meant that candidates planned for finished media content but did not make it, which made it difficult for them to meaningfully complete the evaluation tasks in particular. They found it difficult to evaluate how effectively they developed their content within the contexts of their constraints as they faced few of these when writing a script, or designing costumes, for example, and could not effectively evaluate finished content where little had been made, instead often reiterating their planning decisions.

Some briefs generally made it difficult for candidates to successfully complete all parts of the assignment successfully. For example, some collaboration was inappropriate, such as where two candidates worked together to produce one poster advert. The result of this was that the demands for each candidate were insufficient to allow them to complete all tasks in the appropriate amount of detail. Collaborative campaign design, and a requirement to produce one advert individually as part, of this might have worked better.

Additionally, where the brief was to produce something like a blog, or a song to be used as part of a film soundtrack and merchandise, the project did not relate well to the tasks. Where the project was to create a new product and advertise it, too much time was spent designing and writing about the product rather than the advert created to promote it. And where the brief was to make an advert for a pre-existing product, brand or film, many decisions referenced had already been made by the original creators and could not be credited to the candidate.

## **Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well**

### **Component 1: Question paper**

#### **Question 1: Media Content in Context**

##### **(a) Language to create meaning**

There were some very full answers where candidates insightfully analysed how language codes were used to create meaning. This was sometimes done by close analysis of the particular extract, or by analysis of how, for example, a representation, preferred reading, sense of time, tone or other element was constructed throughout a text.

### **(b) Chosen key aspects**

Some candidates focused exclusively on one key aspect from categories, narrative and representations whilst others covered a mixture of the three. Whichever was the case, candidates performed well when they exemplified concepts in detail and commented on how they had been used in terms of such things as their individual or cumulative meanings, effects or audience engagement. There was some very insightful understanding of the constructed nature of media content.

### **(c) Reactions of audience**

Many candidates found it fairly straightforward to write about audience. Answers that gained the highest marks gave examples of actual or possible audience responses and discussed these using the concepts and terminology of target audience, mode of address, preferred reading and/or differential decoding. Particularly insightful responses to this part of the question were often successfully threaded through the answer to Q1 as a whole, with comment being made on the relationship between the audience reactions and the other key aspects being discussed.

### **Question 2: Role of Media**

Candidates were well rewarded when they gave information relevant to the referenced role of media, made comment on some of the information, and drew at least one conclusion. There were some excellent responses where candidates developed a clear line of argument which showed not only their knowledge of relevant issues but a concerted effort to engage with them by offering critical comment and personal conclusions or opinions.

Such answers made several detailed references to media content to exemplify points, arguments or opinions. Sometimes these references were about content generally, and sometimes they included close textual exemplification and/or references to key aspects where appropriate. Candidates made comments about the references, and these related logically to the discussion.

## **Component 2: Assignment**

### **Section 1: Planning**

Candidates performed best when they dealt with each part of the planning section separately, rather than by producing an integrated response. Successful answers were characterised by clear points of justification which provided a rationale for planning decisions and demonstrated a clear relationship between the decision and the specific area for consideration/research, these being: the brief, creative decisions, and audience, content and institution research.

Successful responses were usually structured in one of two ways: either giving the details of a planning decision followed by a relevant justification; or giving details of the brief, creative ideas or research followed by a planning decision taken and justified as a result of these. In either case, marks were awarded for points of justification: each clear justification was rewarded one mark, and additional marks could be gained for further development of a

justification. Further development was characterised by additional details of the planning decision or research undertaken.

Candidates could therefore gain the highest marks for each part by providing 5 separate points of justification, or a fewer number of justifications with additional development, for example: 4 points of justification worth one mark each, plus another mark for the further development of one of the points.

In relation to each part, successful justifications typically covered:

The **brief**: details of any relevant plan(s) made which could be justified in terms of such things as the genre, purpose, medium, form, finish, audience, stimulus etc; details of the brief and how the candidate hoped to indicate, include or achieve these. Points included a general consideration of the brief or reference to research.

**Creative intentions**: ideas for content, structure, codes etc justified in relation to constructing style, meanings, messages, tone, mood, effect and so on. Points included a general consideration of creative intentions or reference to research.

**Audience** — plans justified in relation to audience targeting, preferred reading, minimising differential decoding, meeting needs, influencing, persuading etc. Research findings on audience were included as part of the justification.

**Content** — justification of plans for content, codes, structure etc in relation to content research, drawing on professional practice and common, interesting or inspirational techniques used in media content. Research findings on content were included as part of the justification.

**Institutional context** — justification of production process plans, or plans for content, codes, structure etc, in relation to constraints or opportunities of institutional contexts. Research findings on institutional contexts were included as part of the justification.

## **Section 2: Development**

### **Evaluation of development within constraints**

Candidates were able to gain the highest marks when they gave at least four clear points of evaluation. Such points detailed information about the nature and implications of institutional contexts (whether opportunities or constraints) and the decisions about either the content and/or the production process made as a result of those constraints. There was also (and crucially) some evaluation of the effectiveness of the decisions made, either in terms of the finished content or production process. Consideration of the final content indicated that the contexts and development referenced were appropriate and supported the discussion.

### **Evaluation of use of media codes and/or techniques**

Candidates who were diligent throughout the Assignment did very well in this task. Careful research, planning and organisation meant that such candidates had a clear sense of what they had wanted to achieve and were therefore able to judge whether or not they had

succeeded. In this respect, high quality content provided plenty of source material for the evaluation, and the combination of the two was well rewarded. Even where available resources did not enable a high technical finish, carefully made content conveyed a clear understanding of how to manipulate media codes, and the candidate was able to convey this in the written evaluation.

Candidates achieving the highest marks gave five or more developed points of evaluation and supported these with specific, detailed examples from the finished content. They did more than discuss individual examples of single codes, instead evaluating such things as the effectiveness of their construction of particular shots or sequences, how print codes were combined to make meaning, the construction of a particular representation, the combined effect of photographic codes used, and so on. Some evaluations included comparisons with professionally produced content.

## **Section 4: Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Component 1: Question Paper**

#### **Question 1: Media Content in Context**

##### **(a) Language to create meaning**

Candidates found it difficult to access the available marks when they only made reference to a few examples of codes and their connotations. This does not constitute a Higher level analysis. At Higher, analysis of language must go beyond simple description of denotations and connotations of individual codes, although it may include these to support points made. A detailed and complex analysis should include points about the use of a range of codes and, where appropriate, the relationship between these, and/or their relationships with the content as a whole.

Some took language to mean spoken language or copy only, rather than the range of medium-specific technical and cultural codes used to create meaning. This limited their engagement with the content and the question.

##### **(b) Chosen key aspects**

Weak answers tended to identify rather than analyse key aspects, and provide limited exemplification. These answers read like an extended list of concept plus example, with very little (if any) comment about how elements had been used to create meaning, elicit an audience response or for any other effect. Such answers tended to be very brief and not of the depth or detail expected at Higher.

### **(c) Reactions of audience**

Weaker answers focused on audience targeting rather than possible responses, or on audience needs only. In such answers, candidates mainly stated how audiences had been targeted or provided for. Sometimes there were implicit or basic statements about audience reactions eg that the referenced audience(s) would like the content, but in general there was little in the way of comment that attempted to address the terms of the question.

### **Question 2: Role of Media**

Weaker answers tended to focus on one or more purpose of media content and outlined the ways in which this was evident in a particular text. Although valid information was produced, there was often very little comment or opinion, simply an explanation of purpose, and this could not be well rewarded. Other weak answers were characterised by what seemed to be a pre-prepared essay for the role of media question given in the specimen or exemplar question paper. The added value of this component is that candidates apply their knowledge to a previously unseen task, and marks are awarded for responses to the specific question given in the exam.

Candidates found it difficult to access marks when the references to media content were sparse and without comment that would help relate them logically to the points made. In addition, some references were very broad or vague (eg to the actions of a particular media owner or institution, or the content of phone messages that had been hacked) and did not clearly support points made.

## **Component 2: Assignment**

### **Section 1: Planning**

Weaker answers were characterised by a number of features:

- ◆ Candidates who produced an extended response covering all 5 areas of justification tended to provide less detail on each than those who dealt with them separately, and had difficulty clearly conveying what active planning decisions had been taken and/or what the reasons behind them were.
- ◆ Some justifications were very short, and did not provide the amount of detail expected at Higher. Others simply indicated personal preference for a choice made (eg 'I chose to make a horror film as this is my favourite genre') rather than appropriately reflecting the expected knowledge and engagement with production processes. Weak answers related to institutional contexts often tended to consist of descriptions about what couldn't be done rather than a justification of plans made to deal with constraints or benefit from opportunities.
- ◆ The plans and/or research described by some candidates indicated that there had been a genuine attempt to compile a planning portfolio, but the responses to the questions did not always include justification linking these two areas. Marks are awarded for the rationale behind planning decisions; it is not sufficient to simply describe either plans or research with no indication of the relationship between them.

- ◆ Finally, it seemed as though some responses to Section 1: Planning had been written after the development stage of the Assignment had been completed. This may have made it difficult for some candidates to remember what they originally planned and why, and often their responses were little more than a description of the final product and process.

## **Section 2: Development**

### **Evaluation of development within constraints**

Weaker answers were most often characterised by a tendency to describe the contexts and problems faced during production, without much discussion or evaluation. In this respect the responses read like production diaries detailing what was carried out on a daily or weekly basis. There was little attempt to evaluate how well the individual had performed or how successful the finished content was given the constraints. Consideration of the final content sometimes revealed that the contexts referenced were irrelevant, eg the ASA code of practice for a short film, or regulations for working with animals when none were featured.

### **Evaluation of use of media codes and/or techniques**

Weaker evaluations usually dealt with a few individual codes such as one particular camera angle, or the use of a particular font. Whilst these are appropriate codes to *include* in an evaluation, discussing them in isolation makes it difficult to produce a considered, reflective evaluation required at Higher and rewarded by the marking scheme.

Some evaluations consisted mainly of description of the final content, with some indication of the planned creative intentions. It was often difficult to find clear points of evaluation in such responses, although implied points were rewarded where possible.

## **Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates**

### **Component 1: Question paper**

Candidates should be given opportunities to accumulate a number of examples of media content they can draw upon when answering the question paper, and should be prepared to answer questions which cover any of the following concepts:

#### **Media content**

- ◆ Categories: genre, purpose, tone, style
- ◆ Language: technical codes, cultural codes, anchorage
- ◆ Narrative: structures, codes, conventions
- ◆ Representation: selection, portrayal, cultural assumptions, ideological discourses

## Media contexts

- ◆ Audience: target audience, mode of address, preferred reading, differential decoding
- ◆ Institution: internal and external controls and constraints
- ◆ Society: time and place (eg ideas, history, events, politics, technology or any other factors relevant to the society in which particular examples of media content were made, set or consumed)

## Role of media

- ◆ Meeting needs: entertainment, education, information
- ◆ Achieving particular purposes: profit, promotion, public service
- ◆ Influencing attitudes and behaviour: intentionally, unintentionally

The Specimen QP, Exemplar QP and 2015 QP, and their marking instructions, could be used to practise exam technique and devise strategies for adapting knowledge and understanding to the terms of the questions that are set.

Many candidates may find it beneficial to answer each part of the Media Content in Context question separately, and answer the Role of Media in an integrated way, but this is not mandatory.

## Component 2: Assignment

Candidates should be given the Assignment specified in the Higher Assessment Task document. Marking instructions reward these tasks only, so other centre-devised tasks should not be used. Although candidates may find it useful to keep notes in a centre-devised logbook or workbook, the material submitted to SQA must correspond to that set out in the task document, ie:

- ◆ responses to Planning task 3
- ◆ the finished media content made in Development task 1
- ◆ responses to Development task 2

No other material is required. Where the work for several candidates is included on one disc or memory stick, or within one piece of content, it must be clearly indicated what work belongs to each candidate.

To ensure that all parts of the Assignment can be completed successfully within the constraints of time and resources, teachers and lecturers should carefully negotiate or set the brief using the advice above and that given in the General Assessment Information document. At Higher, the brief must specify *finished* media content: storyboards, scripts, mock-ups or other pre-production material are not acceptable, and candidates will not be able to adequately complete the written parts of Section 2: Development if they have been given a brief that permits these types of finish.

Marking instructions can be shared with candidates to help them devise a strategy for answering the written parts of the Assignment. The ways in which marks are awarded are clearly indicated, and understanding this can help candidates to structure their responses.

Candidates should be advised to draft/complete their responses to the questions in Section 1 *before* beginning the development stage. Each question should be completed separately rather than combined in an extended response.

Responses to the written parts of Section 2: Development must include points of evaluation — candidates should be advised that they must do more than describe their processes or intentions.

**Course and Unit Support Notes and Common Questions available online give further advice on course content and approaches to teaching and learning. Additional guidance and support has been added to both the General Assessment Information and Assessment Task documents for the Assignment.**

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	0
Number of resulted entries in 2015	587

## Statistical information: Performance of candidates

### Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 100				
A	12.8%	12.8%	75	68
B	25.6%	38.3%	150	56
C	27.9%	66.3%	164	45
D	13.3%	79.6%	78	39
No award	20.4%	-	120	0

The assignment didn't perform fully as expected, particularly in the Planning Section, resulting in a downward adjustment to the Grade Boundaries.

## General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- ◆ Each year, SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- ◆ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related, as they do not contain identical questions.
- ◆ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.