Course report 2023 — externally assessed course component

Higher Media

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative, and to promote better understanding. You should read the report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022:   1,105

Number of resulted entries in 2023:   1,279

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	243	Percentage	19	Cumulative percentage	19	Minimum mark required	62
B	Number of candidates	320	Percentage	25	Cumulative percentage	44	Minimum mark required	53
C	Number of candidates	314	Percentage	24.6	Cumulative percentage	68.6	Minimum mark required	44
D	Number of candidates	237	Percentage	18.5	Cumulative percentage	87.1	Minimum mark required	35
No award	Number of candidates	165	Percentage	12.9	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

♦ 'most' means greater than 70%
♦ 'many' means 50% to 69%
♦ 'some' means 25% to 49%
♦ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the statistics and information page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper 1 — analysis of media content

Question paper 1 largely performed as expected, however the combination of institutions for question 1 and categories for question 2 proved to be a slightly more demanding combination than anticipated and so an adjustment was made to the grade boundary.

Feedback from the marking team and teachers and lecturers indicated that the paper was positively received by centres and was fair and accessible for candidates. Most candidates understood what was required and completed the two required sections in the allocated time.

The optionality introduced as part of the 2022 modifications was retained and continued to function as expected. This is now a permanent part of the paper.

A slightly higher number of candidates chose to respond to question 2 than question 1 in section 1.

Question paper 2 — the role of media

This question paper largely performed as expected. Feedback from the marking team and teachers and lecturers indicated it was positively received by centres and was fair and accessible for candidates.

Most candidates understood what was required and completed the paper in the allocated time.

The removal of the revision support that was available in 2022 meant the paper may have been slightly more challenging than last year due to the unseen element of the concept sampling.

Assignment

The assignment (with the 2022 modifications retained) performed as expected with candidates achieving consistently across all parts of the task. The modifications are now permanent.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper 1 — analysis of media content

In section 1, most candidates selected an appropriate question for the texts they had studied. In both questions 1 and 2, candidates tended to perform better in part (a) of the task, where they were focusing their discussion on just one key aspect. Successful candidates focused on specific examples of institutional factors relevant to their chosen media content for question 1 or on specific examples of categories relevant to their chosen media content in question 2. In both cases, successful candidates discussed specific examples from media content, demonstrating their understanding of the concepts through their discussion. In part (b), successful candidates selected examples of the relevant key aspects, which they analysed in relation to the concept(s) already discussed in part (a).

For both parts (a) and (b), candidates who gained high marks tended to select two concepts to discuss in depth and detail, providing clear exemplification from media content to back up their points, and commenting on the examples given, as relevant to the task. In some cases, candidates achieved well by focusing on just one concept in depth and detail.

For part (b) candidates who gained high marks analysed their chosen concepts in detail and made comments on the relationship between the concepts they had focused on in the two parts of the question, analysing the relationship between content and context, as relevant to the task.

Most successful candidates wrote on just one media text for section 1, and in almost all cases they wrote on moving image, either film or TV. Candidates studied a range of texts including feature-length films, individual TV episodes and whole seasons of TV shows. Texts selected included fiction and non-fiction, although most candidates wrote on fiction texts for this paper. A few candidates successfully wrote on more than one text in their response.

In section 2, the vast majority of candidates chose to write about the film posters. Successful candidates selected clear examples of how key aspects had been used in the posters and went on to analyse how and why this had been done. Candidates who gained high marks focused on specific examples, analysing them in some depth and detail, discussing the creation of meaning and relating this to purpose and/or audience. Most candidates drew some comparisons to the similarities and/or differences between the posters. Candidates who gained high marks discussed these similarities and/or differences in some depth and detail. Overall, candidates seemed to find the texts rich in terms of the examples they were able to select for their analysis, finding a good range of differences and similarities.

Question paper 2 — the role of media

Most candidates responded appropriately to the task, making points about how media content they had studied could be said to have intentionally or unintentionally influenced audiences. The most successful candidates made points that either debated the different influences of the texts they had studied or constructed a line of argument or opinion in response to the task. Other candidates made points of information about the influences of the text(s) they had studied and brought these together to construct points of discussion.

Some candidates produced high-quality, well-structured responses that showed a strong understanding of the task and of the media texts they had studied. Candidates who gained high marks tended to focus on a small number of texts (typically two to three). They used these texts to discuss the sampled concept of influencing audiences' behaviour and/or attitudes, showing a sophisticated understanding of how media texts influence audiences both intentionally and unintentionally, and commenting on specific exemplification from the media content being discussed to expand on their points.

Most candidates chose to focus on a range of texts, with many candidates choosing either shorter texts such as adverts or music videos, or longer texts such as documentaries.

Assignment

Many candidates produced high-quality and well-structured assignments that indicated understanding of the task and familiarity with marking guidance. Candidates tended to perform well when they had written up their responses to section 1 at the same time as doing the required research and planning, before making their content. Candidates who performed well in section 2 showed clear understanding of the process of making media content, reflecting on what they had done and evaluating its effectiveness.

Where candidates used a clearly laid-out and appropriately labelled response, structured with subheadings and bullet points or clearly separated paragraphs, this tended to help them access the full range of marks, particularly in section 1.

Most candidates performed well in section 1 when they clearly indicated the planning decisions they had made and justified these in terms of the requirements of tasks, relating their plans either to their research findings or to achieving their creative intentions.

In section 2 candidates who gained high marks tended to discuss what they had done in detail and then elaborated on the intentions behind their actions, making detailed points of evaluation throughout their discussion.

Where centres had set an appropriate brief allowing candidates space for negotiating and making their own decisions, while working within clearly set out parameters, this enabled candidates to access the full range of marks.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1 — analysis of media content

For question 1, a few candidates opted to discuss examples relating to the media content they had studied that were not relevant institutional factors. These included points such as the prior roles of lead actors, the way a film was screened, the political beliefs of the filmmaker, the political situation at the time of making the film, or the influence of other films on the director. This had an impact on the marks they were able to access for both parts (a) and (b). In most of these cases, candidates wrote about more than one institutional factor, with at least one being relevant, and therefore were able to gain some marks. A small number of candidates wrote about society factors as well as or instead of institutional factors, seeming unsure of the difference.

For question 2, some candidates seemed unsure of how to effectively analyse categories, instead explaining the concept and applying it to the text they had studied. This led to them being unable to access marks due to the lack of analysis in their discussion. Some candidates also tried to cover a range of concepts including several different genres or genre conventions, as well as purpose and/or tone. This led to a superficial analysis and did not allow them to analyse in the depth required by this task. This also had an impact on their ability to access the full range of marks available for part (b).

Across both questions 1 and 2, a few candidates did not integrate their discussion of the sampled key aspect from part (a) in their discussion of the key aspects in part (b). This meant they were not able to achieve more than 4 marks for part (b).

Some candidates who chose to write on more than one text in either question 1 or question 2 found this approach challenging and it led to a less coherent response than candidates who wrote on just one text. Where relevant, this was particularly the case for part (b) in both questions.

Some candidates took an approach to question 3 where they attempted to reference both texts in each paragraph they wrote. This took the form of making a brief point about one text, then linking this to a similar point about the other text. This approach resulted in candidates making a range of points that demonstrated explanation rather than developed points of analysis. This approach also meant candidates made links between the texts but were not able to develop their discussion in sufficient depth in terms of a comparison of the two texts, which limited their mark to a maximum of 6. For these candidates, the approach of referring to both texts in every paragraph also led to the points lacking depth and therefore demonstrating explanation rather than analysis, which at times limited their mark to 4 out of 10.

Question paper 2 — the role of media

Some candidates did not respond adequately to the concept sampled in the task (influencing behaviour and/or attitudes) and rather discussed various roles of the media in a more general way in relation to the media content they had studied. A few of these candidates appeared to be reproducing an essay they had previously learned, discussing one of the concepts that was not sampled in the question paper. Others appeared to be sharing all that they had learned in relation to all the possible concepts that could have been sampled, rather than writing a response to the task in the question paper. Some candidates focused on other areas of the media, such as journalistic integrity or bias, but did not apply this to the task, so could not gain marks for their discussion.

Some less successful candidates focused on the detail of specific examples of the media texts they had studied, giving lengthy descriptions of specific texts, but did not use these examples to make points in response to the task. Others only made broad or sparse references to media texts, or the examples they gave lacked comment to show how they were related to the points being made.

Assignment

The brief set by the centre is an important part of this assessment task. It is crucial that the brief given to candidates lays out clear parameters within which candidates are expected to

work, but without being too restrictive. In some cases, where candidates found a brief too demanding or restrictive, this had a negative impact on their performance.

Where candidates wrote up their responses to section 1 after making their media content, this tended to make the connections between research and planning more muddled and made it harder for them to access marks. A few candidates wrote in past tense, which impeded them when they attempted to discuss their plans as they had clearly already carried out their ideas and were writing this at a point where they could no longer fully recall the justifications for their decisions.

Some candidates were still using the pre-modification structure for their assignment, which meant they were doing significantly more work than the tasks required of them, and this also led to repetition of points, which at times was self-penalising. By the later parts of section 1, some candidates began to repeat plans that had already gained marks in 1(a) or 1(b), which meant they were not able to access all the marks available as marks are awarded for the justification of new plans, in relation to the relevant part of the task.

For section 2, some candidates tended to write an account of what happened or what they had done, similar to a production diary or an analysis of their film, without much reflection or evaluation of how well they had carried out the processes they were describing. This made it harder for them to access the higher mark bands, which require candidates to take an evaluative stance throughout their responses.

For 2(a) some candidates spent time describing problems that had occurred, and some described solutions they had found to these problems, but the lack of evaluation of these solutions meant they were not able to access the higher mark bands.

For 2(b) some candidates simply evaluated sections of their product without also discussing their creative intentions, and this meant they were not able to access the higher mark bands, which require evaluation alongside discussion of the creative intentions and how they were achieved (or not).

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper 1 — analysis of media content

For section 1, question 1 or question 2, teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to write separate responses for parts (a) and (b) as this helps them to focus on addressing what is required by each part of the task. Time should be spent in class looking at ways in which the different contexts and key aspects of content integrate with each other, so that candidates are comfortable with analysing these connections in response to the tasks in the question paper. Exemplification of this approach is available on SQA's Understanding Standards website.

Teachers and lecturers should also ensure candidates are comfortable with all the terminology that might be included in the question paper, and that candidates are familiar with applying these concepts to the text(s) they have studied.

Currently most centres focus on feature-length films for this section, although a growing number of centres are using TV — either single episodes or in some cases a range of examples across a full season from a TV series. Both films and TV shows are appropriate for this paper as moving image content offers candidates a wealth of material from which to draw exemplification. The Higher Media Course Specification has more detail on the types of texts that would be appropriate for the various sections of the course assessment.

Teachers and lecturers should spend time with candidates exploring how best to select and use evidence from the text(s) studied in their responses. They should also ensure candidates have a firm understanding of all seven key aspects that could be sampled in the question paper and should support candidates to develop their analysis skills. This will enable them to use specific and detailed evidence from the text(s) they study in order to give a meaningful response to the question paper tasks.

For question 3, candidates should be encouraged to select the pair of texts that best fits with the type of text they have studied during the course. To prepare for the question paper, time should be spent in class analysing a diverse range of text pairings, covering different genres, eras, styles, and so on. Teaching should focus on how to analyse specific elements of the individual texts in some depth and detail, and also on how a point of comparison could be made, in sufficient depth (teachers and lecturers could use exemplification of this from the Understanding Standards website to support teaching points). In teaching this element of the course there should be an emphasis on depth of analysis of specific and detailed examples of key aspects in a text, as well as on discussing the texts as a pair, focusing on picking out similarities and differences between the texts to analyse.

Candidates could practise writing developed points of analysis of a specific combination of codes selected from one of the texts, and then further develop this or select a new point of analysis for a developed comparison between the pair of texts as a separate point. They should not focus on isolated codes and instead look at how a range of the codes in one text work together to create meaning. When comparing the texts, they should write in detail about the significance of the difference or similarity they have highlighted, in terms of the key aspects. It may be helpful to encourage candidates to think about how the example they are

focusing on is designed to achieve the similar or different purposes of the texts, or how it may appeal to similar or different audiences.

Question paper 2 — the role of media

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates respond to the specific task in the question paper. Candidates should write a single essay-style response in which they develop a line of argument or opinion, making detailed points to back up their argument using specific and detailed evidence from texts they have studied. They should think about how to draw one or more conclusions in relation to the task and the evidence they have selected.

It is essential that candidates understand the importance of responding to the question paper task instead of using a pre-prepared essay because marks are awarded for their ability to discuss the question in the paper.

Studying a variety of texts in class will allow candidates to select from a range of evidence and ensure they are able to respond to the specifics of the task set in the question paper. The texts studied by candidates should provide them with a range of evidence that will allow them to discuss different sides of an argument in relation to any of the three roles of media that could be sampled. Most successful candidates tend to have studied a variety of shorter texts such as adverts or music videos, or in some cases a series of short documentaries. By studying a range of shorter texts, candidates are then able to select evidence that is relevant to the task in the question paper and use this evidence to exemplify the points they make in their argument. Candidates should be encouraged to reflect on how each of the texts they study might fit into the three roles of media, and they should also learn about the sub concepts within each role. Teachers and lecturers should ensure that the range of texts studied in class will allow candidates to do this.

Candidates should spend time in class thinking about how to construct an argument within and across the different roles of media. For example, how the different texts studied might be seen to intentionally or unintentionally influence attitudes and/or behaviour; how the same texts might achieve the different purposes of profit, promotion and public service; and how those texts might be used to meet audience needs.

Assignment

It is essential that centres set a suitable brief. This should provide candidates with some form of creative stimulus but not restrict their ability to negotiate and/or make their own decisions. There is evidence that some briefs are too restrictive and do not allow candidates to have the necessary creative freedom to do well. Teachers and lecturers should carefully consider the impact that any restrictions imposed by the brief might have on candidates' ability to complete all the required tasks.

The brief should take into account the technology available to candidates in that centre, and any other institutional restrictions that may have an impact. Good practice is to provide candidates with two or more possible stimuli, and some room to negotiate things such as form, medium, genre, target audience and purpose. This gives candidates some parameters to work within but does not restrict their ability to make plans that they can justify to access the full range of marks available in section 1.

It is highly recommended that the brief specifies that moving image texts are no longer than 2–3 minutes, and that print posters should be part of a campaign of at least three posters to allow candidates a sufficient range of codes to discuss. It is also recommended that candidates should be making media content similar to content they are studying in other areas of the course. For example, if they are studying film for the analysis paper they could make short films, or if they are analysing print ads for the role of the media paper or for the unseen task, then the brief could be for a print advertising campaign.

Candidates can work as part of a group to produce their media content, but clear parameters in terms of individual roles and responsibilities should be set from the start. All the written responses relating to planning, research and evaluation should relate to the work the individual candidate has carried out in relation to the areas of the group production they have taken responsibility for.

For section 1, candidates should complete the written responses on their plans and justifications as they go along. They do not need to complete them in the order given in the task document (although they should be submitted to SQA in this order), but they should record their plans and decisions, along with their justifications for these, as they work their way through the planning phase. Candidates should complete the written responses for this section before they create their media content. This then gives them a logical progression into section 2 where they evaluate how effective their plans were when put into effect.

For section 2, teachers and lecturers should ensure that candidates know that they must evaluate in order to access the full range of marks. This requires discussion of intentions and/or processes, and then an evaluation of how effective or otherwise these were.

For 2(a), candidates should be focused on discussing specific opportunities and constraints relating to the institutional context in which they are working, and specific tasks they carried out in their production role(s). They should then evaluate how effectively they worked with these opportunities and/or constraints, and what impact their actions, when carrying out their production role(s), had on the process and/or the finished content.

For 2(b), candidates should discuss, in some detail, specific examples of how they hoped to achieve their creative intentions for the finished piece of content. They should then evaluate, in detail, how effective the finished piece is in terms of their original intentions. In discussing their intentions, candidates should give details demonstrating how they intended to create meaning by using a range of technical and cultural codes, and what impact they intended to have on the audience when using these codes. They should then evaluate how effective they were in achieving these intentions in their finished product. Their intentions do not need to have been successfully implemented, and this can be discussed in their evaluation. It is the combination of detailed discussion of the meanings and/or impact the candidates hoped to create, along with the evaluation of how effective this was in the finished content that is being assessed.

This year the use of the digital portal allowing centres to upload candidates' products, both moving image texts and print, was very successful and it is strongly recommended that centres submit candidate work in this way in future. When uploading the candidate's work (for moving image products) a standard format that can be easily read by media players such as VLC or Quicktime should be used, and for print, PDF format should be used. A

physical printout of print texts is also acceptable and can be submitted along with the written response. It should be noted that some centres did not submit a copy of the brief with candidates' responses this year. Due to the change to the flyleaf, the brief must now be submitted as a separate document along with candidates' work.

It continues to be the case that storyboards, hand drawings or sketches are not suitable products for the Higher Media assignment. Candidates are required to submit a finished product along with their written responses.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

♦ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
♦ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
♦ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the [National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).