Course Report 2017

Subject	Media
Level	Higher

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 assessment. 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 documents and marking instructions.

Section 1: Comments on the assessment

Summary of the course assessment

Component 1: question paper

The question paper was judged to be of a similar level of demand to last year's. The performance of candidates was also similar. There was a continuing issue around integration in question 1, where candidates are required to make connections between the specified context and the key aspects of content being analysed. While more candidates showed an awareness of the need to make links between content and context, the links were at times superficial, and any comment on the connection was not always in the depth and detail required at Higher level.

This was also the first year to sample the concept of Society in question 1, which many candidates appeared to find challenging.

Component 2: assignment

The assignment performed less well than expected, particularly the second section of the task. The performance of candidates across this component was weaker than last year.

Overall the grade boundary was set below the notional level as the structure of the marking instructions for this subject has led to fewer marks being awarded that intended, particularly at A and Upper A.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

Question 1: Media Content in Context

Candidates were successful in their responses to the question when they integrated the society factors discussed in part (a) in their discussion of representations in part (b) and the other chosen key aspects of content in part (c).

(a) Society

Where candidates demonstrated a sound understanding of society factors and how these were reflected in texts studied, they performed well in this question.

There were some strong answers where candidates discussed specific, relevant society factors and analysed how these society factors were reflected in the media content exemplified. Some candidates did this through a discussion of the impact of the given society factors on a selection of particular elements of the content: for example, the portrayal of the Joker in 'The Dark Knight' being discussed in terms of the influence of 9/11 and a fear of terrorism in the contemporary society. Other candidates approached this through a discussion of how specific and detailed society factors were reflected throughout a text, such as a detailed discussion of third-wave feminism in terms of its impact on the main characters' development throughout 'Thelma and Louise'.

(b) Representations reflecting Society factors

Many candidates found it fairly straightforward to write about representations and gave detailed responses analysing the construction of representations in the media content they had studied. Successful candidates then analysed how these representations reflected specific society factors, showing how these factors had influenced the construction of the representations in the media content being discussed.

This was done in a range of ways including: focusing on the representations of female characters reflected women's rights in a particular period; discussing how the rise of terrorism in recent times could be seen to be reflected in the representations of heroes and villains in various contemporary films; looking at how representations of certain characters in well-known film franchises have changed through time because of changes in society etc.

(c) Chosen key aspect(s) of content reflecting Society factors

Some candidates focused exclusively on one key aspect from categories, language and narrative, whilst others covered a combination of two of these, or even all three. Whichever was the case, candidates performed well when they analysed concepts in detail, giving specific examples from the media content studied and commenting on how these reflected relevant society factors.

There was some insightful understanding of the constructed nature of media content and how society factors could be seen to be reflected in the chosen key aspect(s). This was done in a range of ways including such things as: linking the rise of popularity of video games and their content to changes in action and sci-fi genre conventions; discussing changes in editing styles through time linked to changes in modern lifestyles and reductions in attention spans; considering how narrative codes such as Propp's character types have been influenced by a contemporary fear of terrorism; and so on.

Question 2: Role of Media

Candidates were well rewarded when they gave several detailed points of information or ideas relevant to the referenced role of media, made comment on some of the information, and drew at least one conclusion with reference to the task and/or the ideas discussed in the essay.

There were some excellent responses where candidates developed a clear line of argument which showed not only their knowledge of relevant issues but also an obvious effort to

engage with them in terms of the task, by offering critical comment and personal opinions. At times these responses drew conclusions throughout the essay as relevant to their line of argument, while at others a clear conclusion was drawn at the end of the essay.

Such answers made several detailed references to media content to exemplify points, arguments or opinions. Sometimes the references made were to a range of content discussed in a more general way, and sometimes they included close textual exemplification and/or references to key aspects. For example, some candidates discussed a range of articles from the press, exemplifying the way broadsheets versus tabloids dealt with a story, or looking at particular bias linked to ownership or political allegiance and the impact this had on specific headlines or articles. Other candidates chose to focus on a small number of adverts, using specific details from the adverts, including language codes and representations. Successful candidates made developed comments about the references, relating their chosen examples logically to the discussion.

Candidates in general performed better when they looked at a range of texts, often linked together by a common theme such as the treatment of gender or bias in the press, rather than using a close analysis of one specific text to exemplify their points, arguments or opinions.

Successful responses generally responded to parts (a) and (b) in an integrated fashion, giving detailed references to media content to exemplify the points being made.

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 that provided a rationale for planning decisions and demonstrated a clear relationship between the decision and the specific area given in the task.

Successful responses for individual parts 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 full marks available for each part by providing five separate points justifying their plans, or a smaller number of justified plans with additional development, for example: four points of justification worth one mark each, plus another mark for the further development of one of the four points.

In relation to each part, successful points typically covered:

1(a) The brief: details of any relevant plans made which could be justified in terms of such things as the genre, purpose, medium, form, audience, stimulus etc; details of the brief and how the candidate hoped to research, include or achieve these. Points of justification included general considerations of the brief, such as a discussion of how specific decisions relating to things like genre, audience or form had been arrived at, or references to specific and detailed plans for research that would be carried out, such as a need to find out how specific genre conventions were used in professionally-produced content, or to discover specific preferences from the target audiences, with justification for this research.

1(b) Audience research: plans justified in relation to audience targeting, preferred reading, minimising differential decoding, meeting needs, influencing, persuading etc. Specific, relevant and detailed research into audience needs and expectations were included as part of the justification.

1(c) Content research: 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. Detailed and specific research findings on content were included as part of the justification.

1(d) Institutional context research: justification of plans for the production process, or plans for content, codes, structure etc, were made in relation to the constraints or opportunities of institutional contexts. Detailed and specific research findings relating to the specific institutional contexts were included as part of the justification.

1(e) Creative intentions: ideas for content, structure, codes etc justified in relation to constructing style, meanings, messages, tone, mood, effect and so on. Justifications included detailed discussion of creative intentions or detailed references to research.

Section 2: Development

2(a) Evaluation of production process

Candidates were able to gain the highest marks when they gave at least four developed points of evaluation. Such points detailed the nature and implications of institutional contexts (whether opportunities, such as equipment available or prior skills and knowledge that could be used, or constraints, such as health and safety considerations, or school and/or industry rules or regulations) and the decisions about either the content and/or the production process made as a result of those constraints. There was also (and crucially) 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.

2(b) Evaluation of finished content

Candidates who were diligent throughout the assignment generally did 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, well-planned content provided plenty of source material for the evaluation, and the combination of the two was rewarded. Even where available

resources did not enable a high technical finish, carefully-made content in combination with a considered piece of evaluation conveyed a clear understanding of how to effectively manipulate media codes. Through evaluating how effectively the finished content did or did not achieve the initial creative intentions, and discussing the reasons for this, candidates were able to provide developed points of 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 in detail such things as the effectiveness of the construction of a series of shots or sequences, how print codes were combined to make meaning, the construction of a particular representation, the combined effect of a range of codes used, and so on. Some evaluations also included relevant comparisons with professionally produced content.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

Question 1: Media Content in Context

(a) Society

Candidates found it difficult to access the available marks when they made reference to society factors in only a general way, not linking them to specific examples of media content. This does not constitute a Higher level analysis. At Higher, analysis of society factors must go beyond simple description of the historical, political or other issues present at the time or place in which the media content was made or set, although it may include these to support points made. Analysis should include detailed points about society factors that can be seen reflected in a specific example of media content, how the factors impacted the content, and, where appropriate, how this led to a wider impact on the content as a whole, or how this was then connected to other related society factors reflected in the same content.

Some took society factors to refer to institutional factors or audience reactions, rather than the specific factors that arose from the time and or place in which the content being analysed was made or set. This limited their engagement with the content and the question. Some candidates focused on society factors that occurred after the media content had been created, and thus did not respond to the task which asked how the content reflected the ideas of society: *Give detailed information about ideas in society which are reflected in the media content*.

(b) Representations reflecting Society factors

Weaker answers focused solely on an analysis of representations in media content, rather than integrating this with an analysis of how society factors could be seen to be reflected in these representations, as directed by the task. In such answers, candidates mainly gave detailed analysis of how representations had been constructed within the media content.

Sometimes there were implicit or basic statements about society factors, eg strong female characters being linked to the rise of feminism, but in general there was little in the way of

comment that attempted to address the terms of the question. There was also an issue with weaker candidates discussing aspects which weren't relevant society factors, such as audience responses or use of technology. These responses could not be given credit as they did not respond appropriately to the task.

(c) Chosen key aspect(s) of content reflecting Society factors

Weaker answers tended to identify rather than analyse other key aspects of content, and provided limited exemplification. These answers read like an extended list of concept plus example, with very little (if any) comment about how elements reflected society factors. Such answers tended to be brief and not of the depth or detail expected at Higher.

Some responses made links to audience reactions and/or institutional factors rather than society factors. As with task 1(b), there were some implicit or basic statements about society factors, 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 explaining one or more way in which specific examples of media content had been created to meet needs, and/or to create a profit. Although valid information was given, there tended to be very little debate, comment or opinion relating this information to the task. Where candidates did not attempt to discuss the examples given in relation to the task, the response could not be well rewarded.

Other weaker answers were characterised by what seemed to be a pre-prepared essay for the role of media question given in the Specimen Question Paper, Exemplar Question Paper or the 2015 or 2016 question papers. These responses could not gain much credit as 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, rather than to a specific article about the case) and did not clearly support points made.

Component 2: assignment

Section 1: Planning

Weaker answers were characterised by a number of features:

♦ Some justifications were very short, and did not provide the amount of detail expected at Higher level. In particular, weaker answers relating to institutional contexts often tended to consist of descriptions of what couldn't be done, rather than a justification of plans made to deal with constraints or benefit from opportunities.

♦ Candidates who produced an extended response covering all five 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.

♦ In a large number of responses there was repetition of points between the five areas of justification. This was most commonly either: points being made about ideas for research to be undertaken in part a) The Brief which were later repeated without expansion in other sections; or points made relating to plans arising from research in parts b) – d) being repeated in part e) Creative Intentions.

♦ 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 at times their responses were little more than a description of the final product and process.

Section 2: Development

2(a) Evaluation of production process

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 or no 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 because they didn't relate to the media content created, so could not be credited.

2(b) Evaluation of finished content

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 the 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 difficult to find clear points of evaluation in such responses, although implied points were rewarded where possible.

Section 3: Advice for the 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 that cover any of the following concepts individually or in combination:

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 or set)

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

The Specimen Question Paper, Exemplar Question Paper, 2015, 2016 and 2017 question papers, 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. There is exemplification of different approaches available on the Understanding Standards website.

Candidates should be prepared to integrate concepts relating to media content and context in their responses to Q1, should the task require this, even if answering each part separately. Candidates should be able to make comment on the links between the given Context (Audience, Society or Institutions) and the Key Aspect(s) of Content they are discussing. These comments should discuss in detail the relationship between content and context, demonstrating how the concepts being analysed are interrelated.

Component 2: Assignment

Candidates should be given a copy of 'Appendix 1: Instructions for Candidates' from the Higher Media Coursework Assessment Task document (this is available from the SQA secure site). Marking instructions reward only the tasks outlined in this document, 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:

- five clearly identified responses to Planning task 3
- the finished media content made in Development task 1
- two clearly identified 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, which work belongs to which candidate must be clearly identified.

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 the advice given in the General Assessment Information document. At Higher level, 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 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 must include developed points of evaluation — candidates should be advised that they must do more than describe their processes or intentions. Each question should be completed separately rather than combined in an extended response.

Course and Unit Support Notes and Common Questions document **are available online and these 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 Coursework Assessment Task documents for the Assignment.

There is exemplification of a range of responses to both the question paper and the assignment available on the Understanding Standards website. The responses exemplify both a range of media content being analysed and a range of approaches to the tasks in the question paper; and different types of media content being produced for the assignment.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	1055

Number of resulted entries in 2017	1013

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	12.2%	12.2%	124	64
B	19.3%	31.6%	196	55
C	28.2%	59.8%	286	46
D	12.1%	72.0%	123	41
No award	28.0%	-	284	-

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.