Course report 2023 — externally assessed course component

National 5 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:   1,102

Number of resulted entries in 2023:   1,302

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	536	Percentage	41.2	Cumulative percentage	41.2	Minimum mark required	84
B	Number of candidates	225	Percentage	17.3	Cumulative percentage	58.4	Minimum mark required	72
C	Number of candidates	181	Percentage	13.9	Cumulative percentage	72.4	Minimum mark required	60
D	Number of candidates	162	Percentage	12.4	Cumulative percentage	84.8	Minimum mark required	48
No award	Number of candidates	198	Percentage	15.2	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

The question paper performed as intended with most candidates managing their time well and completing the paper.

The question paper allowed candidates to demonstrate sound knowledge of the key aspects of media, and there was evidence of careful preparation and guidance. The modifications for session 2022–23 meant that candidates had advance notice of one of the key aspects (institutions) and the specific role of media (influencing attitudes and behaviours) although not the specific questions.

Most candidates were prepared with a selection of texts for different question types and avoided repetition in different questions. It was clear that most teachers and lecturers had selected media content that was stimulating, age-appropriate and varied.

Most candidates responded well in the analysis of a media text section, with the majority displaying good skills of analysis.

Assignment

The assignment performed as expected.

It is evident that candidates understood what was required. The modifications to assessment (in place for session 2022–23) of combining the research into internal and external controls, and reducing the development section from five examples to four, appeared to help candidates.

For the development section most candidates structured their responses into (a) and (b) answers, as directed by the assignment assessment task. The introduction of a template for the answers was helpful to those who chose to use it.

As in previous years, there were some original, entertaining, and creative assignments (particularly in film and storyboards) where candidates showed considerable technical expertise.

It was clear that many candidates had engaged well with the process, whether working individually or in groups.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper

Most candidates approached the question paper methodically and showed considerable knowledge. Centres taught varied and appropriate content and candidates made good choices in matching this to the questions.

Most candidates completed the paper and some wrote a substantial amount for every question.

Candidates achieved high marks in different ways: whether for detailed knowledge shown in many individual points, or by developing points they had made.

Question 1 (categories, genre): most candidates were able to describe genre conventions and then give specific examples from their chosen media content. Horror was a clear favourite with the conventions of gore, menace, isolated setting, the 'final girl' and jump-scares featuring predominantly. The sitcom was also a popular choice with candidates discussing the use of stereotypes, repeated locations, laughter-tracks, episodic conventions, slapstick and one-liners.

Question 2 (representation, language): many candidates wrote about the representation of teenagers, women and heroes and/or villains. The use of costume, body language, lighting, camera angles, editing and sound were often used for exemplification. However, some candidates simply described a representation, rather than explaining how it was created by language, as per the question.

Question 3 (narrative): this was straightforward, and many candidates gained high marks. Most candidates chose to discuss the narrative theories of Tzvetan Todorov and were able to segment media content into stages. However, some candidates were unable to access all available marks as they only referenced the stages in the text without explaining what the stage involves or giving specific examples. Joseph Campbell's theory of 'The Hero's Journey' was also popular, as was Vladimir Propp's analysis of character roles. Others answered well on binary oppositions and enigma codes. Candidates were able to apply these theories to a wide selection of texts, although mainstream film was the most popular choice. Some candidates wrote a great deal on this question, which meant they might have run out of time later.

Question 4 (institutions): candidates knew that this key aspect would be sampled so many were well prepared with detailed institutional knowledge and how their chosen media content was impacted. However, some candidates struggled to explain the impact of institutional factors on their chosen media content. Some candidates wrote about the response and/or reaction to the media content after it had been released — for example in film often going into great detail about box office gross figures, quotations from critical reviews, audience responses, sometimes even linking the film to social movements and events (for example Black Lives Matter) that happened years after the film was released.

Question 5 (role of media: influencing attitudes and behaviours): this question was very open and gave candidates scope to discuss mainstream media and/or public service texts.

Candidates used public service adverts extensively, which worked well due to their clear messages and formats.

Question 6 (analysis of a media text): most candidates dealt with this successfully. The film poster (*The School of Good and Evil*) was by far the most popular option, and many candidates showed a very good understanding of the dramatic elements depicted and could relate this to purpose and audience. Many wrote about the strong representation of women and how this might appeal to a female audience. There was also very good analysis on the layout of the poster, use of colour, body language, facial expressions, costume and props. However, some candidates made simplistic points about elements in the poster but did not fully analyse these in terms of purpose and/or audience.

The few candidates who attempted the magazine cover or advertisement options displayed sound knowledge of textual elements appropriate to the texts.

Assignment

The reduction of 5 marks in the planning section (by combining internal and external controls) and 7 marks in the development section (by only asking for four examples instead of five) was helpful, and most candidates completed the assignment.

As in previous years, most teachers and lecturers had negotiated stimulating, individualised briefs with their candidates and given clear direction. Candidates who followed a clear structure and approached the questions in a systematic manner performed well. Templates worked well (whether centre or SQA devised). There seemed to be fewer centres than in previous years submitting candidate work in the wrong format or responding to the wrong questions. Candidates have benefited from the clear instruction to complete their planning work before making their product.

Section 1: planning

Surveys and focus groups worked well for this section, with candidates showing clear understanding of how research into audience would affect the planning of a media product.

Many candidates had conducted relevant, targeted research, and could explain the relationship between the research findings and the planning decisions made. This meant that candidates were likely to make the connections required.

However, not all candidates defined relevant research connected to specific plans. As in previous years, in question 1 (audience), some candidates discussed research into content, rather than research into audience. For example, some discussed genre conventions or narrative or stereotyping in detail, and then made simplistic statements about who they thought might like this. This question requires them to consider their target audience and conduct focused research. Candidates who undertook surveys or focus groups tackled this question more successfully.

Section 2: development

As always, the standard of many National 5 media products was excellent, particularly films and storyboards. Simple briefs (for example films of only a two-minute duration, or a single page advertisement) worked well, and left time for writing up afterwards.

Assignments that allowed candidates to use their imagination worked well, whether in producing storyboards, posters or moving image texts. Short films made on mobile phones, and hand-drawn posters showed how basic equipment could be successful, if candidates could explain the impact or connotations they intended.

Posters that included just one main image were sometimes problematic for candidates when it came to writing up their development section, as there wasn't enough to write about.

Not all candidates made their individual input into a group production clear enough.

When candidates had been given a product to design and advertise, such as a gadget, they sometimes spent too much time designing and naming this, rather than concentrating on the advertisement of it in a media text. In addition, sometimes they evaluated the product, rather than their media text(s).

Another issue was centres who had allowed candidates to make posters for films that already exist, and they had taken screenshots of moments from the film. This meant that in the development section they were limited in the marks they could achieve, for example if they hadn't decided on representation, colour, lighting or layout they couldn't gain marks for those elements, just the decision to include that moment in the poster. This meant it was more like content research than development.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Centres new to the course should ensure knowledgeable staff are delivering the qualification, and seek support, training and development where appropriate. Support materials from SQA include Understanding Standards material, webinars and the course support notes. There is also a subject implementation manager for Media who can carry out centre development visits.

Question paper

Teachers and lecturers should refer to the course specification to ensure that all mandatory course content has been covered.

As with previous years, it is important that candidates are provided with a selection of texts to choose from in answering the questions — some questions are more suited to certain types of media content. The role of media should be taught with different types of media content, which fulfil different purposes — those that entertain, educate and/or inform. Candidate preferences should be considered, although there is also merit in learning about media content they would not usually experience. Texts with simple narrative structures work well, as complex narratives can be hard to deconstruct.

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates understand the clear difference between questions that ask them to describe, and those that ask them to explain. 'Explain' questions require candidates to give detailed textual exemplification that shows cause and effect.

Teachers and lecturers should cover different genres from different time periods when preparing for the analysis of a media text section.

Assignment

Centres should incorporate candidate preferences when creating the brief to encourage engagement. However, giving too much freedom can lead to candidates not prioritising tasks. Asking candidates to design a media product, for example a new toy, and then creating a media text to advertise it, can result in candidates spending too long on creating a consumer product, rather than the media content. In addition, it must be made clear to candidates that it is the media product they are researching, planning and developing, not the consumer product.

Candidates should carry out clear research before making planning decisions. Some candidates simply seem to rely on impressions that they have received as to what certain audience segments 'might like'. Candidates will achieve marks in this section if they ensure that there is a description of a finding rather than a statement of a survey result, and a clear link to a planning decision.

It is crucial that candidates write up their notes on planning as they work through the assignment rather than tackling this at the end. If they do this they will demonstrate full understanding of how research into audience, internal and/or external institutional factors

and key aspects, has influenced their plans, rather than simply reverting to describing the media content they produced.

Candidates should have a clear idea of their role in group productions to ensure individualised work, particularly with research in the planning section.

Successful assignments tend to have a clear brief (for example a 12-panel storyboard for a trailer) with some institutional constraints relevant to a school production or professional context. This gives candidates a good deal of scope to be creative within certain parameters.

Finally, in the development section, candidates tend to do well when their four chosen examples allow them to draw on a good range of codes, for example a storyboard that includes lighting, colour, shot type and costume, or a sequence of several shots from a film.

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.