



Course report 2024

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 with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2024 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 1,279

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 1,597

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	322	Percentage	20.2	Cumulative percentage	20.2	Minimum mark required	65
B	Number of candidates	437	Percentage	27.4	Cumulative percentage	47.5	Minimum mark required	56
C	Number of candidates	364	Percentage	22.8	Cumulative percentage	70.3	Minimum mark required	48
D	Number of candidates	278	Percentage	17.4	Cumulative percentage	87.7	Minimum mark required	39
No award	Number of candidates	196	Percentage	12.3	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

We have not applied rounding 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 statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper 1: Analysis of media content

Question paper 1 largely performed as expected. Feedback from the marking team and teachers and lecturers indicated that centres positively received the paper, and it was fair and accessible for candidates.

In section 1, a significantly higher number of candidates chose to respond to question 1 rather than question 2. This didn't have an impact on overall performance, but was interesting to note.

Most candidates attempted the film poster pairing in section 2, with very few candidates responding on the magazine covers or advertisements.

Question paper 2: Role of media

Question paper 2 largely performed as expected. Feedback from the marking team and teachers and lecturers indicated that centres positively received the paper, and it was fair and accessible for candidates. Most candidates completed the paper in the allocated time.

Assignment

The assignment, with the 2021/22 modifications retained (which are now permanent changes), performed largely as expected.

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 focused their discussion on just one key aspect. Successful candidates focused on specific examples of society factors relevant to their chosen media content for question 1, or on specific examples of language codes and techniques relevant to their chosen media content in question 2, focusing on how these codes and techniques worked together with one scene or sequence to create meaning. 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 relevant key aspects which they analysed in relation to the concept already discussed in part (a).

For both parts (a) and (b), high-scoring candidates tended to select two concepts to discuss in depth and detail, providing clear exemplification from media content to support their points and commenting on the examples given as relevant to the task. In some cases, candidates scored well by focusing on just one concept in depth and detail. For part (b), high-scoring candidates analysed their chosen concepts in detail and commented on the relationship between these concepts and those discussed in part (a), 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 television. Candidates studied a wide range of texts, including feature-length films, individual television episodes, and two or three episodes from a season of a television series. Texts selected included fiction and non-fiction, although the majority of candidates wrote on fiction texts for this paper. A few candidates successfully wrote about more than one text in their response.

In section 2, almost all candidates chose to write about the film posters. Successful candidates selected clear examples of how key aspects had been used in the posters and analysed in detail how and why this had been done. High-scoring candidates focused on specific examples, analysing them in depth and detail, discussing the creation of meaning and relating this to purpose and/or audience. Almost all candidates identified similarities and/or differences between the posters. High-scoring candidates discussed these similarities and/or differences in some depth and detail. Overall, candidates found the texts rich in terms of the examples they could select for their analysis, finding a good range of differences and similarities.

Question paper 2: Role of media

Most candidates responded appropriately to the task, making points about how the media content they had studied could be said to have met audience needs. The most successful candidates made points that either debated the different needs being met by the texts they had studied, or constructed a line of argument or opinion in response to the task, looking at how a text might meet a single need, while other texts might meet multiple needs.

Some candidates produced high-quality, well-structured responses that showed a strong understanding of the task and media texts they had studied. High-scoring candidates tended to focus on a small number of texts (typically 1 to 3), using these texts to discuss how they met audience needs. These candidates showed a sophisticated understanding of how media texts do this, 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 shorter texts, such as adverts or music videos. A few candidates successfully focused on longer texts, such as feature films or documentaries.

Assignment

Many candidates produced high-quality and well-structured assignments that indicated understanding of the task and familiarity with marking criteria. 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.

Use of a clearly laid out and appropriately labelled structure for the response, using the task order in the current coursework assessment task to organise the response, was very helpful in supporting candidates to access the full range of marks, particularly in section 1. The use of subheadings, bullet points or clearly separated paragraphs, and page numbers also contributed to this.

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 to either their research findings or to achieving their creative intentions.

In section 2, high-scoring candidates discussed what they did in detail, and then elaborated on the intentions behind their actions, making detailed points of evaluation throughout their discussion. For example, an approach which many successful candidates took when dealing with a moving image text was to select a short segment of the text and to discuss how various codes — such as camera, mise-en-scène, editing and sound — had been used in that section, discussing how the codes worked together. The candidates then went on to evaluate the effectiveness of this section of their film by making judgements about how well they had succeeded in achieving the meaning or intended impact. Some successful candidates repeated this approach by looking at five different segments of their moving image text, while others did this for 2-to-4 paragraphs and then considered codes which ran throughout the film, such as representations or narrative conventions, to make their remaining points. In these cases, the candidates discussed in detail how they constructed a representation or used a narrative convention before evaluating its effectiveness in terms of achieving their creative intentions.

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

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1: Analysis of media content

For question 1, some candidates wrote about society factors that were not relevant to the media content they had studied, such as events that happened after the release date of a film that couldn't have influenced the content of the film, or historical stereotypes such as that of the 'happy slave' in *Get Out*, which is part of representations rather than a society factor. This had an impact on the marks candidates were able to access for both parts (a) and (b). In most of these cases the candidates wrote about more than one society factor, with at least one being relevant, and therefore were able to gain marks. A few candidates wrote about audience or institutional factors as well as, or instead of, society factors, and seemed unsure of the difference. Things such as not being able to film at a desired location because of something that had happened there, or the impact of the Hays Code on the text, were institutional rather than society factors. References to ways in which specific audiences might respond to aspects of the text, such as deaf audiences responding well to the casting of a deaf actress or the way the male gaze might be interpreted by female audiences, were audience rather than society factors.

For question 2, some candidates seemed unsure of how to effectively analyse language, instead explaining isolated examples of different codes from across the text they had studied. This led to a superficial analysis and did not allow them to analyse in the depth required for this task. This also had an impact on their ability to access the full range of marks available for part (b).

Across both question 1 and 2, a few candidates did not integrate their discussion of the concept sampled in 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 in which 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 which were explanations, rather than developed points of analysis. This approach also meant the 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, and this limited their marks to a maximum of 6. For these candidates, the approach of referring to both texts in every paragraph also led to the points being too thin, and was therefore explanation rather than analysis, which at times limited their mark to 4 out of 10.

Question paper 2: Role of media

A few candidates did not respond adequately to the concept sampled in the task (meeting audience needs), and instead 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 concepts that weren't sampled in the question paper. Others appeared to be sharing all that they had learned in

relation to all of the possible concepts that could have been sampled, rather than writing a response to the task in the question paper. The marks for this paper were awarded for the candidate's ability to discuss the specific role of media sampled in the paper in terms of the task set, and their ability to use specific examples of media content to back up these points. If a candidate did not discuss the role sampled in the paper, or did not discuss the role in terms of the task, it limited the range of marks available to them.

A few less-successful candidates focused on the detail of specific examples in the media texts they had studied, giving lengthy descriptions of the texts, but they didn't 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.

A few candidates focused on a broad range of disparate texts (for example a feature-length documentary, a couple of adverts for very different products, and a short film), which led to a lack of coherence in their responses, as they offered several points of information without constructing a line of argument or discussion about the way the different texts met audiences' needs. Others who used a broad range of texts tried to cover too many different points in their response, which led to a more superficial discussion and/or references which lacked the required detail.

Assignment

The brief the centre sets is an important part of this assessment task. It is crucial that the brief centres give to candidates lays out clear parameters in which candidates are expected to work, while not being too restrictive. While there was an improvement on previous years, there were still a few cases where candidates found a brief too demanding or restrictive, which did not allow for creative freedom and had a negative impact on their performance. For moving image texts, briefs which required candidates to make films longer than a maximum of 2 to 3 minutes led to candidates doing significantly more work than required for their film, often at the expense of the written response.

Candidates who wrote up their responses to section 1 after making their media content tended to make connections between research and planning that were less clear, which 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 2019 structure for their assignment, which had six tasks rather than four. This meant they were doing significantly more work than required, leading to repetition of points, which at times was self-penalising. In the later tasks of section 1, some candidates repeated plans that had already been credited in their responses to tasks 1(a) or 1(b) which meant they weren't able to access all the marks available, as credit is given for the justification of new plans in relation to the relevant part of the task.

For section 2, some candidates wrote an account of 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 that require candidates to take an evaluative stance throughout their responses. For task 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 the impact or success of these solutions meant they were not able to access the higher mark bands. For task 2(b), some candidates described the codes they had used to achieve their creative intentions without evaluating how effective these were. Conversely, other candidates simply evaluated sections of their product without also discussing their creative intentions. In both cases, this meant they were not able to access the higher mark bands, as these require both discussion of creative intentions and evaluation of how well they were implemented (or not).

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper 1: Analysis of media content

For section 1, questions 1 and 2, centres should encourage candidates to write separate responses for parts (a) and (b), as this supports candidates to focus on addressing what is required by each part of the task. Centres should also encourage candidates to focus on two concepts from within the key aspect(s) being sampled by the question, and to write on these in depth and detail. For part (b), teachers and lecturers should spend time 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 that part of the task in the question paper. Exemplification of this approach is available on the [Understanding Standards website](#).

Teachers and lecturers should also ensure candidates are comfortable with all the terminology that might arise in the question paper, and that candidates are familiar with applying these concepts correctly to the texts they have studied.

Currently, most centres focus on feature-length films for this section, although a growing number of centres are using television — either single episodes or, in some cases, two or three episodes across a full season from a television series. Both films and television 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 texts 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 in developing their analysis skills in relation to these key aspects. This will enable them to use specific and detailed evidence from the texts 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 which best fits with the type of text they have studied during the course. In preparation for the question paper, candidates should spend time in class analysing a diverse range of text pairings, covering for example different genres, eras and styles and so on. Teaching should focus on how to analyse specific elements of the individual texts in some depth and detail, and on how a point of comparison could be made in depth and detail (exemplification of this from the [Understanding Standards website](#) could be used to support teaching points). In teaching this element of the course, teachers and lecturers should emphasise depth of analysis of specific and detailed examples from a text, as well as discussing the texts as a pair, focusing on picking out similarities and differences between the texts to discuss in depth.

To prepare for this task, candidates could practise writing developed points of analysis of a specific combination of language codes selected from one of the texts, relating the use of language to other key aspects. They could then further develop this analysis or select a new point of analysis for a developed comparison between the pair of texts as a separate point. They should be discouraged from focusing on isolated codes, and instead encouraged to

look at how a range of the codes in one text work together to create meaning. When comparing texts, candidates should be encouraged to write in detail about the significance of the difference or similarity they have highlighted, focusing on the reasons for that difference or similarity. 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: Role of media

Candidates should be taught to respond to the specific task in the question paper. This is of key importance for the discussion element of the marking instructions. They should be taught to develop a line of argument or opinion, making detailed points of information to back up the argument, in a single essay-style response. They should also be taught to provide specific and detailed evidence from texts they have studied to back up points they make in response to the task, commenting on how this evidence supports their points. Candidates should also spend time thinking 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 and not using a pre-prepared essay, as marks are awarded for their ability to discuss the task in the paper.

Studying a variety of texts in class can allow candidates to select from a range of evidence and ensures they are able to respond to the specifics of the task set in the question paper. However, teachers and lecturers should remind candidates not to refer to too wide a range of texts, as this could limit the depth of their discussion. Two or three shorter texts is sufficient to provide a wealth of evidence and discussion. The texts candidates study should provide them with a range of evidence which will allow them to construct a line of 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 can be used 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.

This year, a few candidates successfully worked with a single, longer text, such as a feature film or feature-length documentary. This is also a valid approach, provided the text is rich enough to offer a range of evidence that can allow candidates to discuss any of the three roles of media and the sub-concepts. Similar to using a range of shorter texts, if working with a longer text, teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates are able to discuss how the text might fit into any of the three roles of media, and candidates should spend time selecting appropriate evidence from across the text to support these arguments.

Time should also be spent in class thinking about how an argument might be constructed within and also across the different roles of media. This should involve looking at how the texts studied might meet audience needs for information, education or entertainment, as

sampled in this year's paper. Candidates should also spend time considering how the same text(s) might achieve the different purposes of profit, promotion and public service, or how the text(s) might intentionally or unintentionally influence attitudes and/or behaviour. It is important that time is spent considering more than one perspective for each of the roles of media that could be sampled in the question paper.

Assignment

For the assignment, it is essential that centres set a suitable brief. This should provide candidates with some form of creative stimulus, but should not restrict their ability to negotiate and/or make their own decisions. Teachers and lecturers should carefully consider the impact that any restrictions imposed by the brief might have on candidates' ability to complete all the tasks required of them in section 1. It is good practice to provide candidates with two or more possible stimuli, and also some room to negotiate things such as genre, target audience, purpose, form and medium. The brief should also take into account the technology available to candidates in that centre, and any other institutional restrictions that may have an impact. It should give candidates some parameters to work within but not be too restrictive. This means candidates will be able to make plans which they can fully justify, allowing them to access the full range of marks available in section 1. Teachers and lecturers can use the sample briefs with commentaries on the [Understanding Standards website](#) for support in creating a brief appropriate to their context.

It is also highly recommended that the brief specifies that moving image texts be no longer than a maximum of 2 to 3 minutes, and that print texts should be part of a campaign of at least three posters or adverts to allow candidates the space to use a sufficient range of codes for their written response. 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 in question paper 1, then the brief could be for a range of ads for a print advertising campaign.

It is perfectly acceptable for candidates to work as part of a group to produce their media content, but teachers and lecturers should set clear parameters in terms of individual roles and responsibilities from the outset. All the written responses relating to planning, research and evaluation should relate to the work the individual candidate has carried out in the areas of the group production they have taken responsibility for.

For section 1, candidates should be encouraged to complete the written response, discussing their plans and justifications as they go along. They do not need to complete the tasks in the order given in the coursework assessment 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, as this then gives them a logical progression into section 2, where they evaluate how effective their plans were when put into effect. It is also worthwhile for candidates to redraft section 1 once it is complete, focusing on avoiding the repetition of plans and ensuring they can access the full range of marks.

For section 2, it is important that teachers and lecturers make clear to candidates that they must discuss their creative intentions and the processes they implemented to achieve their intentions in detail, and then must evaluate how effective, or otherwise, these were.

For task 2(a), candidates should focus 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), in some detail. They should then evaluate how effectively they worked with these opportunities and/or constraints, and/or evaluate the impact of their actions when carrying out their production role on the process and/or the finished content. It is the combination of detailed discussion of the development process, along with the evaluation of how effective any action they took was, that is being assessed.

For task 2(b), candidates should discuss, in depth and 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 the discussion of 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 effectively they achieved 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.

Centres' use of the digital portal to upload the candidates' products — both moving image texts and print — was very successful, and it is strongly recommended that centres continue to submit candidate work (the media product only) in this way in future. When uploading candidates' work, for moving image products, centres should use a standard format easily read by media players, such as VLC or Quicktime; for print work, a 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 omitted to 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 printed document, along with the candidates' written response.

Storyboards, hand drawings, or sketches are not suitable products for the Higher Media assignment. Candidates are required to submit a finished product 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.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in [March 2024](#) and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).