Course report 2025

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 with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2025 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2024:   1,358

Number of resulted entries in 2025:   1,398

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	520	37.2	37.2	84
B	308	22.0	59.2	72
C	230	16.5	75.7	60
D	159	11.4	87.1	48
No award	181	12.9	100%	Not applicable

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 or equal to 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

The question paper performed as expected. In section one, the key aspects sampled from the course allowed the candidates to use a range of texts and demonstrate their media knowledge. These key aspects were included in a mix of question types with different levels of demand which allowed the candidates who had prepared well to display their skills of analysis. The questions were carefully selected to avoid repetition across questions.

In section two, the choice of poster proved challenging for some candidates, but the magazine front cover and advertisement were easily accessible. As is typical, the magazine and advertisement were selected by very few candidates. For this reason, these options are being removed from 2026 onwards.

Overall, the balance of challenge across these two sections of the paper was in line with previous years.

Assignment

The assignment is unchanged and performed as expected.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper

The question paper allowed candidates to demonstrate sound knowledge of the key aspects of media. Most candidates were prepared with a selection of texts for different question types and avoided repetition in different questions. Most candidates made good choices in matching content to the questions.

Most candidates approached the question paper methodically and completed the paper. Some wrote a substantial amount for every question. Candidates achieved a range of marks in different ways: whether for showing detailed knowledge in many individual points, or by developing points they had made.

Section one – Analysis of Media Content in Context

Most candidates prepared well, with a good selection of texts to base their answers on and were able to access questions that either asked them to 'describe' or 'explain'.

Question 1 (Categories: genre)

Some candidates achieved high marks. The genre conventions of horror and 'coming-of-age' films were popular choices, backed up with contextual information on cultural and technical codes. Horror was a clear favourite with the conventions of gore, menace, isolated setting, the 'final girl' and jump-scares featuring predominantly. The sit-com was also a popular choice with candidates discussing the use of stereotypes, repeated locations, laughter-tracks, episodic conventions, slapstick and one-liners. *Friends* and *Derry Girls* were popular choices.

Question 2 (Representation: stereotypes)

Many candidates looked at stereotypes of teenagers, heroes and villains and used good textual exemplification of the key aspect of language to support their points. The use of costume, body language, lighting, camera angles, editing and sound were often used for analysis. *The Breakfast Club*, *The Dark Knight* and *The Shawshank Redemption* were popular texts. However, some candidates simply discussed representation in general without demonstrating an understanding of stereotypes, as specified in the question.

Question 3 (Narrative)

Most candidates achieved high marks through a straightforward approach, working their way through a variety of narrative theorists. Most candidates chose to discuss the narrative theories of Tzvetan Todorov and were able to segment media content into stages. However, some candidates did not gain high marks as they only referenced the stages in the text without explaining what the stage involves or giving specific examples. For example, some candidates made vague statements such as 'normality means everything is normal', without describing how this is typically displayed in media content, and did not use a specific example from their chosen content. There was also some misunderstanding that the final stage 'return to normality' was always a return to a 'happy' situation at the start. Some candidates suggested all new normalities were exactly the same as the normality defined at the beginning.

Joseph Campbell's theory of 'The Hero's Journey' was also a popular point of discussion, as was Vladimir Propp's analysis of character roles including heroes, villains, helpers and princesses. Others also answered well on binary oppositions and enigma codes. Many candidates were able to apply these theories to a wide selection of texts, although mainstream film was the most popular choice. Many candidates wrote much more than was required to gain full marks for this question. There was evidence that this affected the time available for later questions, as many candidates wrote very little for later questions.

Question 4(a) Institutions

Most candidates described the institutional factors of budget and legal constraints and achieved high marks.

Question 4(b) Institutions

Many candidates explained in detail the influence of budget in terms of access to special effects and the legal constraints of the British Board of Film Classification (BFFC) and health and safety. Some candidates did not give specific examples from their chosen text or texts to exemplify their points. Others gave irrelevant information such as discussing the institution of the BBFC when they were discussing a poster, or rules about the employment of children when there were no children in their chosen media content.

Question 5 (Role of media: meeting needs — to be educated, entertained or informed)

Many candidates discussed the Australian train safety advert *Dumb Ways to Die* or other road safety adverts in terms of fulfilling a need to be educated or informed. Public service adverts were used extensively and worked well due to their clear messages and formats. Not all candidates gave detailed textual evidence for this question, making simple assertions such as 'it's funny so people will like it.' Those that achieved high marks did so by linking the role of media to other key aspects such as language and representation.

Section two: Analysis of a Media Text

Question 6 (Film poster — Testament of Youth; Magazine — Science and Nature; Advert — Zico drink)

Some candidates showed a very good understanding of the dramatic elements depicted in the film poster and could relate this to purpose and audience. Many wrote about the elements of romance, war and drama and how this might appeal to a

variety of audiences. There was also good analysis on the layout of the poster, mise-en-scène, use of colour, body language, facial expressions and costume.

The film poster may have been less of a familiar genre to some candidates but was 'rich' enough for some very good analysis (in terms of format, colour, font, positioning, gender, cultural references, body language, and composition). However, some candidates made some very simplistic comments on the textual or institutional elements of the poster and did not fully analyse these in terms of purpose and/or audience.

Assignment

As in every year, there were some inventive and entertaining assignments, particularly in film, where candidates showed considerable technical expertise through a variety of approaches. Group productions worked well for film as there were many tasks to complete. However, the candidate's individual input had to be clear.

Most teachers and lecturers negotiated stimulating, individualised briefs with realistic timescales. 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. When media briefs were too specific or restrictive, it was not obvious to candidates where they could conduct research and make their own creative decisions. These candidates struggled to make planning decisions of their own.

Templates worked well (whether centre or SQA-devised). Storyboard briefs are still the most popular option for the National 5 assignment and generally perform well.

Section 1: planning

Candidates did well in audience where they had conducted a survey, either in person or digitally, of their target audience's needs and/or expectations. They explained the results of this in detail, alongside a detailed planning decision based on the information gathered. Focus groups also worked well for this section, with candidates showing a clear understanding on how research into audience would affect the

planning of a media product. The most successful candidates based each point around a specific audience research question asked, discussed results and then made a specific planning choice for their content based on this.

Many candidates conducted relevant, targeted research, and could explain the relationship between the research findings and the planning decisions made. This meant that these candidates were likely to make the connections required, sometimes above and beyond the requirements for full marks.

The most effective content research was conducted into a text of a similar form and genre. Candidates explored how several codes combined to create a representation or genre convention, then explained in detail how they might use a similar idea in their own product.

However, not all candidates defined *relevant* research connected to specific plans and the connection wasn't clear. Some candidates did research into media content in this section, rather than focusing on audience.

Section 2: development

For the development section, most candidates structured their responses into (a) and (b) answers, as directed by the coursework assessment task.

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 accessible formats could be successful if candidates explain the impact or connotations they intended. There was some interesting use of editing software – Video Star, Alight Motion, DaVinci Resolve, and the Stop Motion Studio app. However, elements that are 'lifted' from templates rather than devised by candidates did not gain marks.

Many candidates' comments on development were strong and featured detailed comments on a variety of techniques, showing an understanding of how these techniques worked together to create meaning.

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.

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.

Evaluation points for all types of content were often more successful when commenting on potential improvements or changes rather than successes. This is due to points about successes often repeating information already provided in part (a) of the evaluation.

Some candidates struggled to access marks in the development section where they had used an existing photo of, for example, the cast, a still from the film, or a cropped image from an existing print advert, as the decisions they had made themselves were limited to text placement, font, background colour, and so on. Some candidates evaluated elements that they hadn't created themselves, for example, the costume, camera, lighting in the pre-existing image.

Some candidates are still doing five examples for the development section instead of four. A fifth example would not be marked.

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, the annual webinar 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, whilst focusing on candidate needs and preferences.

Teachers and lecturers must continue to provide candidates with a selection of texts as some questions are more suited to certain types of media content. They should also continue to select media content which is entertaining, thought-provoking and age-appropriate. Teachers and lecturers should teach the role of media with different types of media content that fulfil different purposes, for example those that entertain, educate and/or inform. Teachers and lecturers should consider candidate preferences, although there is also merit in candidates learning about media content they would not usually experience. Texts with simple narrative structures work well, as complex narratives can be hard to deconstruct. Examples are given in the course support notes section of the course specification.

Teachers and lecturers should teach candidates the clear difference between questions which 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 of film posters from different time periods when preparing candidates for the 'Analysis of a Media Text' section.

The teaching of this section is a focus of the media webinar taking place in January 2026 and this will be available to all practitioners afterwards.

Assignment

Teachers and lecturers should incorporate candidate preferences when creating the brief to encourage engagement. However, giving too much freedom can lead to candidates not approaching the task with media content as a focus. Asking the candidates to design a media product, for example a new toy, and then create 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, teachers and lecturers must make it clear to candidates that it is the *media* product they are researching, planning and developing, not the consumer product.

Planning decisions should be made after careful research. Some candidates rely on stereotypical impressions as to what certain audience segments 'might like'. Candidates must provide a description of a finding and a clear link to a planning decision to ensure they achieve marks in this section.

It is crucial that candidates write up their notes on planning as they work through the assignment. If they do this, they demonstrate full understanding of how research into audience, internal and/or external institutional factors and key aspects has influenced their plans. If they wait until the end of the assignment, there is a danger they could simply end up describing the media content they produced.

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

Teachers and lecturers should not allow candidates to make posters or trailers for films that already exist, as this means candidates can be limited in the marks they are able to gain in the development section. For example, if they hadn't decided upon representation, colour, lighting, layout etc, they couldn't be given credit for those elements. They would just be given marks for the decision to include that moment in the poster or trailer.

Successful assignments tend to have a clear brief (for example a 12-panel storyboard for a trailer) with some institutional constraints such as budget or 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, costume etc, or a sequence of several shots from a film.

Candidates should number the pages of their assignment, correctly label shots, and provide timestamps, so that their work can be credited appropriately.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

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

For most National Courses, we aim 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, we hold 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 our 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. We 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.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy](#).