

Course report 2026

National 5 Media, SCQF level 5

We've written this report for teachers and lecturers. We recommend you read this with the published course assessment documents and marking instructions.

Note: we've made changes to the course assessment from session 2026–27.

Check your [subject page](#) for more information.

The report:

- provides a summary of how each course component performed
- highlights areas of the question paper and coursework where candidates performed well and areas where they did not perform well
- has advice you might find useful when preparing candidates for assessment

We collect and prepare the statistics in course reports before we complete the appeals process.

Statistical and grade boundary information

Course entries

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 1,398

Number of resulted entries in 2026: 1,422

Distribution of course awards (including minimum mark to achieve each grade)

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	617	43.4	43.4	84
B	306	21.5	64.9	72
C	221	15.5	80.5	60
D	141	9.9	90.4	48
No award	137	9.6	100	Not applicable

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

In this report:

- 'Most' means greater than or equal to 70%.
- 'Many' means 50% to 69%.
- 'Some' means 25% to 49%.
- 'Few' or 'a few' means less than 25%.

You can find [statistical reports](#) on our website.

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's 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 make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Senior Qualifications Scotland staff normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors use 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.

- We can adjust the grade boundaries downwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- We can adjust the grade boundaries upwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- If levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries.

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](#).

How the course assessment performed

Question paper

The question paper performed as intended. In section one, the key aspects sampled from the course allowed candidates to use a range of texts and demonstrate their media knowledge. This section included a variety of question types with different levels of demand, which allowed candidates who had prepared well to demonstrate their analytical skills and knowledge of media content.

In section two, the poster was accessible and appropriate, reflecting a familiar and popular media genre.

The balance of challenge across these two sections was appropriate.

Assignment

We made no changes to the assignment and it performed as expected.

How candidates performed

Question paper

Most candidates demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of the key aspects of media. Most candidates were prepared with a selection of texts for different question types and avoided unnecessary repetition in different questions. Most candidates matched their chosen media texts well to the demands of each question. Centres selected engaging, thought-provoking and age-appropriate media content, enabling candidates to respond confidently.

Most candidates completed the paper. Responses varied in length, with some candidates writing a large amount for every question. Candidates achieved marks through different approaches, either by demonstrating detailed knowledge across a range of points or by developing fewer points in greater depth.

Section one — Analysis of Media Content in Context

Most candidates were well prepared, selecting appropriate texts and responding effectively to questions that asked them to ‘describe’ or ‘explain’.

Question 1 — Representation

Many candidates successfully described how stereotypes were constructed, using examples such as representations of teenagers, heroes and villains. Candidates who achieved the highest marks supported analysis with detailed textual evidence, including discussion of costume, body language, lighting, camera angles, editing, sound and key narrative moments. Popular texts included *The Breakfast Club*, *Shutter Island*, *Get Out*, *Paddington* and *The Shawshank Redemption*. Candidates also referred to sitcoms such as *Friends*, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* and *Derry Girls*.

Question 2(a) — Tone

Most candidates identified and described tones such as fear, happiness and darkness. Some candidates selected less conventional descriptions, including ‘flamboyant’, but successfully clarified these as conveying excitement, energy or spectacle within the context of the media text.

Question 2(b) — Tone

Most candidates responded effectively to this question, demonstrating a clear understanding of how tone is created through media language and supporting their answers with relevant textual evidence. Technical and cultural codes included costume, body language, framing, camera angles and movement, editing, sound and lighting.

Question 3 — Narrative

Most candidates achieved high marks by applying a range of narrative theories. Most candidates used the theory of Tzvetan Todorov and identified the stages of the narrative structure. Almost all candidates discussed how film narratives mostly follow a linear, chronological progression through five key stages: a state of equilibrium, a disruption, a realisation of the disruption, an attempt to fix the problem, and ultimately, a new transformed normality.

However, some candidates were unable to access marks as they named the stages without explaining their purpose or illustrating them with specific examples from the chosen text. For example, some candidates made statements such as ‘normality means everything is normal’, without explaining how equilibrium is typically established in media content. Some candidates misunderstood the concept of a ‘new equilibrium’, assuming that the narrative must always return to the same happy state presented at the beginning.

Many candidates used Vladimir Propp’s character theory effectively, particularly when discussing heroes, villains, helpers and princesses. Some candidates produced high-quality responses discussing binary oppositions and enigma codes. A few candidates discussed Joseph Campbell’s narrative theory of ‘The Hero’s Journey’.

Many candidates successfully applied these theories across a range of media texts, with mainstream films the most popular choice. Some candidates wrote more than was needed to achieve full marks, and this may have reduced the time available for later questions.

Question 4(a) — Audience

Many candidates discussed audience responses in terms of positive and negative reactions to media content and supported these with appropriate examples.

Question 4(b) — Audience

Candidates who achieved the highest marks explored how representations of characters shaped audience reactions. For example, candidates analysing *Get Out* considered how audience demographics might influence differing interpretations of the film's main characters and narrative moments.

Some candidates achieved fewer marks because they provided responses focused on target audience rather than audience response, which did not address the specific requirements of the question.

Question 5(a) — Role of media: influencing attitudes and behaviour

This question enabled candidates to discuss both mainstream media and public service campaigns. Many candidates selected the Australian rail safety campaign *Dumb Ways to Die* or road safety advertisements, explaining how these texts encouraged safer behaviour. Public information campaigns were particularly effective examples due to their clear purposes and persuasive techniques.

Question 5(b) — Role of media: influencing attitudes and behaviour

Some candidates did not support their responses with enough textual evidence, relying on general statements such as 'it's funny so people will like it'. Candidates who achieved the highest marks effectively linked the role of media with other key aspects, including media language and representation, to explain audience impact.

Section Two — Analysis of a Media Text

Question 6 — Film poster: Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace

Many candidates demonstrated a strong understanding of the dramatic elements presented in the poster and related these effectively to purpose and audience. Many candidates identified genre conventions of science fiction and gave a discussion of how these features appealed to different audiences.

Many candidates gave a detailed analysis of layout, mise-en-scène, colour, body language, facial expression, costume and composition. The richness of the poster provided opportunities for careful analysis of format, typography, positioning, gender representation, cultural references and design decisions.

Some candidates, however, made only basic observations about institutional elements such as actor names, release dates or the film title, without analysing how these contributed to purpose or audience appeal.

A few candidates misinterpreted the question by focusing solely on identifying the genre or describing the visual features of the poster. As a result, they did not adequately address purpose and audience and were unable to access the higher mark bands.

Assignment

Candidates engaged positively with the assignment, displaying personalisation and creative choice.

Many assignments were inventive and engaging, particularly in film, where candidates demonstrated considerable technical skill through a range of creative approaches. Group productions often gained high marks, although you should ensure there is clear evidence of each candidate's individual contribution.

Most briefs were stimulating and individualised with realistic timescales. Simple briefs, for example, short films or single-page advertisements, were often more effective as they allowed enough time for evaluating and written commentary. When briefs were too specific or restrictive, candidates had fewer opportunities to conduct meaningful research or make independent creative decisions, limiting the quality of planning evidence.

Templates that were centre-produced or downloaded from our website worked well for candidates. Storyboard briefs were the most popular, with short films and moving-image products also popular.

Section 1: planning

Candidates performed particularly well in the audience section when they conducted primary research through surveys or focus groups. Candidates performed well when they explained the findings in detail and clearly demonstrated how their research informed planning decisions.

Candidates who achieved the highest marks structured each point around a specific research question, analysed the findings and then explained the resulting production decision.

Many candidates conducted focused and relevant research, successfully demonstrating the relationship between research findings and planning choices. This enabled them to make explicit links that sometimes exceeded the requirements for full marks.

Candidates who produced the most effective content research examined texts of a similar genre and form, analysing how media codes combined to create representations or genre conventions before explaining how they would use similar techniques in their own product.

Candidates who achieved fewer marks did not clearly connect research findings to specific planning decisions. In some cases, candidates analysed existing media texts rather than conducting audience research, limiting the number of marks they could achieve.

Section 2: development

Most candidates structured their responses appropriately into parts (a) and (b), following the coursework assessment task guidance.

Assignments that allowed candidates to be creative, for example, storyboards, posters and moving-image products, often achieved the highest marks. Some candidates created short films using mobile phones and hand-drawn posters, showing that accessible production methods could be effective when candidates clearly explained their intended impact and connotations.

Many candidates made effective use of a range of editing software, including Video Star, Alight Motion, DaVinci Resolve and CapCut. However, candidates did not gain any marks for taking features directly from templates or pre-existing designs, as they could not show their own creative decisions.

Many candidates produced detailed evaluations, discussing how a range of production techniques combined to create meaning.

Poster designs featuring only a single central image limited candidates' ability to discuss a sufficient range of development decisions. Similarly, candidates who designed products for advertisements occasionally focused too heavily on the product itself rather than on the construction of the advertisement as a media text. In these cases, evaluation often centred on the product being advertised, rather than the media product.

Evaluation responses were often stronger when candidates identified areas for improvement or refinement rather than describing successful aspects of the production, as this avoided repeating points already made in part (a).

Some candidates struggled to access marks where they relied heavily on existing images, such as film stills, cast photographs or pre-existing advertisements. Their own creative input was often limited to layout, typography and background colour, restricting opportunities for meaningful evaluation. In some cases, candidates evaluated production elements that they had not created themselves, such as costume, lighting or camera work.

A few candidates gave five examples in the development section instead of the required four. You should instruct candidates to follow the requirements set out in the coursework assessment task.

Preparing candidates for assessment

When new to the course, you should ensure that staff delivering the qualification have the appropriate subject knowledge and expertise, and engage with the available support, training and professional learning opportunities. We provide a range of resources, including [Understanding Standards](#) materials, webinars and course support notes on our [website](#). The subject implementation manager for Media can provide centre development visits and tailored guidance.

Question paper

You should refer closely to the course specification to ensure you have covered all mandatory course content while adapting delivery to reflect the needs and interests of individual candidates.

You should ensure candidates are familiar with a range of media texts so that they can select appropriate examples when responding to questions as some questions are more suited to certain types of media content. Candidates should study media texts that demonstrate the diverse roles of the media, including those that entertain, educate and inform. While you should consider candidates' interests to encourage engagement, there is educational value in allowing them to experience unfamiliar forms of media. Texts with straightforward narrative structures are often more accessible for candidates to analyse, as complex narratives can be hard to deconstruct. Examples are provided in the course support notes.

You should ensure candidates develop a clear understanding of the difference between describe and explain command words. 'Explain' questions require candidates to give detailed textual evidence that shows cause-and-effect rather than giving a simple description.

From session 2026–27 the number of marks allocated to the question paper has reduced from 60 marks to 48 marks, and the time available to complete the paper has reduced by 20 minutes. You should use the updated specimen question paper to show candidates the format of the revised exam.

Assignment

You should incorporate candidate interests when creating the assignment brief to engage and motivate candidates. However, briefs should be focused to ensure that candidates concentrate on producing media content rather than developing a consumer product. For example, asking candidates to design a new toy before producing advertising material for it can result in candidates giving too much attention to the consumer product. You should ensure candidates are clear that the focus of their research, planning and development is the media product, not the item being advertised.

Candidates should make planning decisions after careful research. Some candidates rely on stereotypical assumptions about what certain audience segments may find appealing. Candidates who performed well demonstrated a clear connection between specific research findings and their planning decisions. Explicitly linking evidence from research to creative choices enables candidates to access marks more effectively in this section.

You should encourage candidates to document and evaluate their planning decisions throughout the production process rather than trying to complete this later. Doing this allows them to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of how audience research, institutional considerations and key media concepts have influenced the development of their work, rather than describing the finished product.

Where group productions are carried out, you should ensure that each candidate produces individualised evidence, particularly in the research and planning sections. Each candidate must have a clearly defined role in the production process.

You should avoid allowing candidates to produce posters or trailers for existing films as this can restrict opportunities for candidates to demonstrate independent decision-making in the development section. For example, if key creative decisions relating to representation, colour, lighting, layout, or similar production elements have already been determined by the original text, candidates can only gain marks for selecting existing content rather than showing their own creative choices.

Assignments that achieve the highest marks typically have a clear brief — for example, the production of a 12-panel storyboard for a film trailer or a 1-minute film — supported by realistic institutional constraints such as budget limitations or production conditions appropriate to either a school-based or professional context. These parameters provide a framework in which candidates can demonstrate creativity while making purposeful production decisions. In the development section, candidates performed well when the four examples they selected enabled them to discuss a range of media codes, such as lighting, colour, shot type, costume, sound and composition, or where they analysed a sequence of interconnected shots rather than isolated examples.

Candidates should number the pages of their assignment, correctly label shots, and provide timestamps where appropriate, as clear presentation and precise referencing ensures that evidence is identified and credited accurately.