



Common questions about National 3, National 4, National 5 and Higher Media

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Assessment of Media courses from session 2023–24

What are the arrangements for National 3 and National 4 for session 2023–24 onwards?

National 3 and National 4 Media are back to full unit requirements. There are no modifications to any of these units. The Media assignment added value unit is mandatory.

What are the assessment arrangements for National 5 from session 2023–24 onwards?

There is no change to the format of the National 5 question paper — it is 2 hours long and worth 60 marks. There is no advance notice of content that will be sampled.

In the assignment, the modifications to the planning phase and the development phase have been made permanent. The coursework assessment task published on the [National 5 Media subject page](#) was updated to reflect these changes.

In section 1 (planning), candidates must complete only one section of institutional research instead of two. The planning phase consists of four questions worth 5 marks each. Section 1 is marked out of 20.

In section 2 (development), candidates must discuss four examples from their media content rather than five. Section 2 is marked out of 28.

Where can I find National 5 Media exemplification?

National standards are exemplified through samples of candidates' responses and assessment commentaries on SQA's [Understanding Standards National 5 Media](#) web page.

What are the assessment arrangements for Higher from session 2023–24 onwards?

At Higher, the changes that were made to question paper 1 (Analysis of Media Content) and to the assignment have been made permanent. There was no change to question paper 2 (The Role of Media).

In question paper 1, section 1 — Analysis of Media Content in Context, candidates have the option of answering **either** question 1 **or** question 2. Section 1 is marked out of 20.

Question paper 1 is marked out of 30 and is 1 hour and 45 minutes long.

In the assignment, all modifications have been made permanent. The coursework assessment task published on the [Higher Media subject page](#) was updated to reflect these changes:

- ◆ Candidates only complete **one** area of content research, instead of two.

- ◆ The institutional context research and production role(s) sections are replaced by one section in which candidates have the option of writing about institutional research **and/or** production role(s).

Section 1 is marked out of 20. There is no change to section 2 (development). The assignment is worth 50 marks.

Why have the modifications been retained for question paper 1?

The optionality between question 1 and 2 has been retained because it allows candidates to demonstrate their analysis skills without over-assessing them.

What difference does the optionality in question paper 1 make to preparing candidates for the exam?

Both question 1 and question 2 specify a key aspect in part a (a **context-based** key aspect in question 1, and a **content-based** key aspect in question 2), and give candidates a choice of key aspects in part b.

Previously, candidates had to prepare to write about all four content-based and all three context-based key aspects, as they needed to answer both questions, which are unseen. However, with the optionality between questions 1 and 2, it is possible to reduce the number of key aspects that candidates need to focus on for the question paper, and this reduces the preparation time they need.

For instance, if candidates prepare for all three **context-based** key aspects ('audience', 'institutions' and 'society'), they would be well-equipped to answer question 1a, and would not need to prepare for all four **content-based** key aspects — they could choose to focus on just two or three of them in order to answer part b. Equally, if they prepared for all four **content-based** key aspects ('categories', 'language', 'narrative' and 'representation'), they would be well-prepared to answer question 2a, and would only need to prepare for two out of the three **context-based** key aspects in order to answer part b.

More than one text is often analysed for this question paper, but optionality makes it easier for teachers, lecturers and candidates to study just one major text, helping to reduce preparation time. It is still acceptable for candidates to answer on various texts if they wish.

Where can I find Higher Media exemplification?

National standards are exemplified through samples of candidates' responses and assessment commentaries on [SQA's Understanding Standards Higher Media](#) web page.

Do the updated arrangements mean past papers and specimen question papers are no longer relevant?

There is no change to the format of the question paper at National 5, so past papers and the specimen question paper remain relevant and continue to exemplify the kinds of questions candidates must prepare for.

At Higher, the only change to the format of the question paper is the introduction of optionality between questions 1 and 2 in question paper 1. There is a small change to the rubric on the front page of the exam booklet and in the wording of the questions, as candidates are no longer instructed to answer all questions. There is no change to question paper 2. Past papers remain relevant and the specimen question paper has been updated.

Course assessment — question papers

Are there set texts to use?

No, we do not prescribe texts. We advise that texts are chosen in discussion with candidates, based on their preferences, interests, age, sensitivities and maturity. Not all texts are suitable for all candidates. If centres chose to use, for example, 18 certificate films, it is recommended by the BBFC that parental permission is sought before teaching the text. The [frequently asked questions](#) on the BBFC website provide more information.

Suggested texts are listed in the course specifications for [National 5](#) and [Higher](#).

Can the same texts be analysed for both National 5 and Higher?

Yes, any media content can be used at any level. However, teachers and lecturers should ensure that all content studied is appropriate for the candidate both thematically and in terms of complexity. Some content is therefore better suited for older candidates studying Higher, and some is better suited to younger candidates studying National 5.

How many media texts should candidates study and/or be assessed on?

There are no prescribed types or amounts of media content that candidates should study. You should present candidates with an engaging range of media content that allows them to acquire the skills, knowledge and understanding outlined in course specifications. Advice on the types of media texts that might be suitable for various levels are in the course support notes.

At National 5 and Higher, course assessment samples from across the mandatory skills, knowledge and understanding stated in the course specifications. You should give candidates opportunities to accumulate examples of media content that illustrate their knowledge of the concepts that can be sampled in a question paper.

Candidates can reference one or more examples of media content in their response to any question paper item.

In course documents, why are ‘medium’ and ‘form’ referenced in relation to the key aspect of ‘language’ rather than ‘categories’, where they traditionally sit?

At National 5 and Higher, knowledge of ‘medium’ and ‘form’ are not individually sampled in course assessment and they are not listed as mandatory knowledge for ‘categories’.

However, ‘medium’ and ‘form’ are relevant terms for categorising media content and you may wish to refer to them during analysis. They are referenced in language as follows: ‘medium/form-specific technical codes, cultural codes and anchorage’. It is not necessary to cover every type of technical code, cultural code or type of anchorage found in media content; only those relevant to the medium, form or content being studied.

How should we approach the role of media in National 5 and Higher Media?

The three roles of media that National 5 and Higher candidates can be expected to understand, apply, and be assessed on, are the same at both levels, and are as follows:

- ◆ influencing behaviour and attitudes (intentionally or unintentionally)
- ◆ meeting needs (for information, entertainment, education)
- ◆ achieving particular purposes (profit, promotion, public service)

This list represents **mandatory** content. In the question paper, candidates should prepare to answer questions on any of these roles. Questions may be general or may focus on one or more of the elements given in brackets.

At National 5, candidates should give clear examples of how the role of media is (or may be) evident in, or applied to, media content, as above.

At Higher, candidates should discuss the role of media referenced in the question. By 'discuss' we mean communicate ideas and information on the role of media, and offer opinions, arguments or conclusions backed up with evidence from at least one example of media content.

Specimen question papers exemplify 'role of media' questions and the accompanying marking instructions describe in detail how they are marked.

Possible approaches

Influencing behaviour and attitudes — intentionally, unintentionally:

- ◆ the intended influence of media content on individuals, groups or organisations
- ◆ the unintended, possible or consequential effect of media content

Meeting needs — information, entertainment, education:

- ◆ reasons people may have for consuming particular media content
- ◆ how producers use their knowledge of these needs to construct content in particular ways
- ◆ how reactions to content may depend on the extent to which needs are met

Achieving particular purposes — profit, promotion, public service:

- ◆ profit motives
- ◆ promotion — of products, ideas, individuals or organisations, as appropriate to the content
- ◆ public service — content that does not only have a profit motive, but which benefits, advises or helps individuals or groups, or acts on their behalf

Roles of media are defined broadly to be as flexible as possible and so they can be applied in a way that is appropriate to the media content being studied.

Examples of what candidates could examine include:

- ◆ the intentional creation of behaviours and/or attitudes by public service or commercial advertisers
- ◆ theories about effects of violence in films
- ◆ ideas about the role of mainstream media in influencing voter opinion
- ◆ the effect of investment and funding on the predominance of genre texts
- ◆ the role of media in challenging or perpetuating stereotypes or ideological perspectives
- ◆ historical or contemporary analysis, within or across texts, genres, or different media

These are examples — they do not represent an exhaustive, prescriptive or mandatory list, and anything else relevant to selected content or the interests of candidates is acceptable. The examples show that the role of media should not be seen as an unfamiliar, new topic with complex ideas but, rather, as another way to use already familiar concepts and key aspects to frame and consider analysis of media content.

We do not expect that candidates gain complex knowledge of, for example, sociological or psychological theories about the potential role of media, although you can include such perspectives if they are relevant to content and/or candidate ability. Rather, we expect candidates to be able to exemplify or discuss ways in which facts, opinions, or perspectives on the role of media are evident in, or can be applied to, examples of content.

Can candidates use new media (for example internet, digital media, social media) texts to respond either to ‘analysis of media content’ or ‘role of the media’ questions?

The course specifications for National 5 and Higher are deliberately open and non-prescriptive, allowing candidates to study a wide range of different media, as appropriate to their needs and interests. Many examples of media content that would have traditionally been accessed via print, television or film are now accessed via the internet or mobile apps (for example: news articles delivered via Facebook feeds; TV and film via Netflix, iPlayer, Disney+, Paramount, Amazon Prime).

It is appropriate to use new media texts as the basis for answering questions in the Analysis of Media Content question paper, and the shift in delivery and consumption should allow for interesting reflection on audience, society and institutional contexts. For example, you could discuss the use of algorithmic marketing to target particular news articles to individuals on Facebook, or to create lists of suggested viewing on Netflix, and the narrative freedom arising from the absence of fixed programme lengths and advertising breaks in content made for streaming services.

As far as the role of the media is concerned, new media texts can potentially allow for interesting reflections on how the media interact with society. For instance, candidates could look at the role of YouTubers or Instagrammers as paid brand ambassadors. The use of ‘influencer marketing’ could be contrasted with more traditional brand advertising strategies, and there are potentially fruitful areas for reflection around the ways that this kind of marketing blurs boundaries between the roles of profit, promotion and entertainment, and around its intentional and unintentional influences on behaviour and attitudes.

When using new media texts for either ‘analysis of media content’ or ‘role of the media’ questions, it is important to bear in mind the requirement for reference to ‘particular media content’. This means that approaches that simply reference a platform (for example Twitter, Facebook and Snapchat), rather than specific media content that may be distributed via that platform, are unlikely to be successful. It is also important to ensure that the texts chosen are rich enough to allow for a depth of discussion appropriate to the question.

When answering ‘analysis of media content’ questions, candidates must be able to discuss content-based key aspects as exemplified in their chosen content at the appropriate level of depth for National 5 or Higher. Similarly, for ‘role of the media’ questions, they must refer in detail to the text(s) to exemplify their discussion of the question. It is therefore likely that the most suitable content to discuss will be professionally-produced media texts that demonstrate a full range of codes and conventions, rather than individual posts to social media or micro-blogging platforms such as Facebook or Twitter.

What is meant by the context of ‘society’?

Society contexts — time, place

At both National 5 and Higher, candidates should describe facts or ideas relevant to the society in which at least one example of media content was produced or set and explain the effect of these on the content.

Specimen question papers and marking instructions exemplify questions and describe in detail how they are marked.

In terms of contexts, we are accustomed to audience and institution. The context of society is included to increase the possible approaches to the study of media and is defined as ‘time’ and ‘place’. The terms ‘time’ and ‘place’ encompass any relevant societal factors that might apply to media content (anything from fandom to technology, economics, history, politics, and social and cultural factors). Society is an extremely broad concept and it can be defined and applied in any appropriate way relevant to the content being studied.

Some of the ways in which societal factors are described may be similar to concepts from other key aspects, but the overlapping nature of concepts is something we are accustomed to, for example genre analysis may include reference to narrative, representation and language. As with the role of media, including the concept of society gives us another way to approach and frame analysis, rather than adding any previously unknown or complex ideas.

Course assessment — assignment

What should an assignment brief contain?

The assignment brief at both National 5 and Higher should be realistic, achievable, and supportive. At both levels it should give candidates a clear understanding of the medium, form, and level of finish required for their product. It should always be possible for the candidate to negotiate their brief, but there are several ways in which the brief can support them in generating ideas for their product, for example by:

- ◆ providing a choice of different briefs, maybe for products in different media (for example by providing briefs for films and for print texts so that candidates can choose their preferred medium)
- ◆ providing stimuli for candidates (for example a picture, a short piece of writing)
- ◆ providing clear guidance as to how much they are expected to produce, for example no more than 2 minutes for a film text; one poster (for National 5); a front cover of a magazine (for National 5); three posters for an advertising campaign (for Higher); a front cover plus one or two pages of content for a magazine (for Higher)
- ◆ suggesting a genre to work in

However, it should be noted that an overly restrictive brief can be harmful to candidates as it may not allow them to develop their own ideas sufficiently. The Understanding Standards website includes [examples of Higher briefs with commentaries](#).

For both levels, it is necessary to include the brief with the candidate's written work when submitting it.

How much support and time should we give candidates for their written submission for the Media assignment?

There is no time limit specified for the Media assignment, and we expect candidates to complete it independently. The National 4 added value unit assessment and the National 5 and Higher course assessment tasks give advice on what constitutes reasonable assistance to candidates.

At National 5 and Higher, we recommend that candidates complete the written part of the planning section after completing the other planning tasks, rather than waiting until they have made their content. When their assignments are complete, it can sometimes be difficult for candidates to separate their reflection on planning from their reflection on developed or finished media content.

When setting a brief for their Media assignment, is a storyboard an acceptable level of finish for candidates?

A storyboard **is** an acceptable level of finish at National 4 and National 5.

A storyboard **is not** an acceptable level of finish at Higher. At Higher, we expect candidates to make finished content — this can be an extract or a complete piece. Candidates who

make and submit a storyboard at Higher level cannot access the full range of marks available for the Media assignment.

The National 4 added value unit assessment and the National 5 and Higher course specifications give full advice.

If candidates create a storyboard for their National 5 assignment, how can they evaluate it, given that they have not gone through the full production process?

Candidates can still evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their ideas as expressed in their storyboard, so they are not disadvantaged compared to those who have created finished products.

Can candidates submit a group production for the National 5 and Higher assignments?

Yes, a group production is acceptable. However, it is very important that candidates' roles in the production are clearly defined (for instance, one candidate could be fully responsible for one section of a short film, or they could take on a clearly defined role such as cinematographer, director or editor). Candidates' responses to the planning phase questions and to the development phase must be clearly focused on the element(s) of the production that they were personally responsible for — any responses that focus on elements that were another candidate's responsibility will not gain marks.

Can candidates use templates to create their product (such as the trailer templates on iMovie)?

We recommend that, wherever possible, candidates produce their finished products without the use of templates. It is permissible to use templates, but it can severely limit candidate's options when it comes to evaluating their product. This is because in both the planning and development phases of the assignment, candidates can only gain marks for their own work, so where a template has built-in choices of music, font, or editing transitions, candidates cannot gain marks for those choices when they write about them.

How should candidates' Media products be submitted?

At National 5, if candidates have made storyboards, then it should be included with their written work.

At National 5 and Higher, if candidates have made a film, then we recommend online submission through the online portal that is available via SQA Connect. If candidates have made print texts (for example posters, adverts, magazines), a pdf version of their final product can also be submitted via the same portal.

For further information on submission, please see page 7 of the [Coursework for External Assessment](#) document.

Unit assessment

Can I still use the National 5 and Higher units?

Yes, the National 5 and Higher units still exist as freestanding units, and you can enter candidates for them if appropriate. However, the units no longer form part of the National 5 or Higher courses, and you should not enter candidates for both the National 5 course and the SCQF level 5 units at the same time, or the Higher course and SCQF level 6 units at the same time.

For the units, can I use the same 'creating media content' brief with candidates at different levels?

Yes, any brief can be used or adapted across different levels. There are two important things to bear in mind:

- ◆ You should be confident that all the relevant assessment tasks can be completed in relation to the given brief.
- ◆ You must ensure that the candidate is assessed against the appropriate assessment standards for the level they are studying, even where a brief has been used or adapted from that given in a unit assessment support pack for another level.

Can I use a brief from a Creating Media Content unit assessment support pack for the Media assignment?

Yes, any brief can be used or adapted for the Media assignment at National 4, National 5 and Higher, and can be based on an experience, a theme, an extract from a book, a news story, or anything else that suggests an idea for media content. There are two important things to bear in mind:

- ◆ You should be confident that all the assignment tasks can be completed in relation to the given brief.
- ◆ You must ensure that the candidate is given the appropriate assignment tasks for their level, even where you have used or adapted a brief from another level.

Do candidates have to make an entire production for both the Creating Media Content unit and the Media assignment?

No, the Creating Media Content unit focuses on the individual skills needed to plan, make and evaluate media content; there is no need to develop and assess these within the context of a full production, although this is not precluded. Individual planning, making and evaluation tasks, or material generated in response to learning and teaching activities, can be used to gather evidence for assessment standards.

You will find general questions and answers about National Qualifications on our website at www.sqa.org.uk/faq.

National Progression Awards (NPAs)

What NPAs are available in film and media?

There are two NPAs in Film and Media — one at SCQF level 5 and one at SCQF level 6.

What is an NPA?

NPAs are group awards with a vocational focus. The NPAs in Film and Media both focus more on practical skills and film-making than the National Qualifications in Media.

What do the Film and Media NPAs consist of?

Both Film and Media NPAs have a similar structure: to achieve the course award candidates must pass four units, two of which are mandatory and two of which are drawn from a selection of optional units. The full list of units for each award is available on the NPA section of SQA's website:

- ◆ [NPA Film and Media SCQF level 5](#)
- ◆ [NPA Film and Media SCQF level 6](#)

Is there an exam for the NPAs?

No. NPAs are unit based, and all assessment is internal and potentially subject to external verification.

How do I introduce the NPA at my centre?

If you are presenting one of these NPAs for the first time, then you will need to apply for approval. This is a paper-based process and you can find out more about it under the heading 'Deliver this qualification' on SQA's website page for each NPA:

- ◆ [NPA Film and Media SCQF level 5](#)
- ◆ [NPA Film and Media SCQF level 6](#)