



## Association for Media Education in Scotland

AMES is a registered Scottish charity SC029408 ([ames.scot](http://ames.scot))

### **AMES survey on attainment in 2017 National 5 and Higher Media**

#### **Introduction**

Following the publication of results of the 2017 diet on 8 August, it quickly became apparent that there was a perception by teachers of something being amiss in the Higher Media results. Several AMES members emailed, all experienced teachers of English and of Media, and said that were disturbed by the results. The story was the same: English results as expected; Media very disappointing. One school had decided not to offer the subject again; in another National 5 Media pupils did not want to take Higher Media because “it was not worth the risk”; one teacher decided not to teach the subject again until its problems were fixed.

On 12 August, AMES decided to conduct an online survey, emailing all examination centres. The survey closed on 15 September and these are the end results.

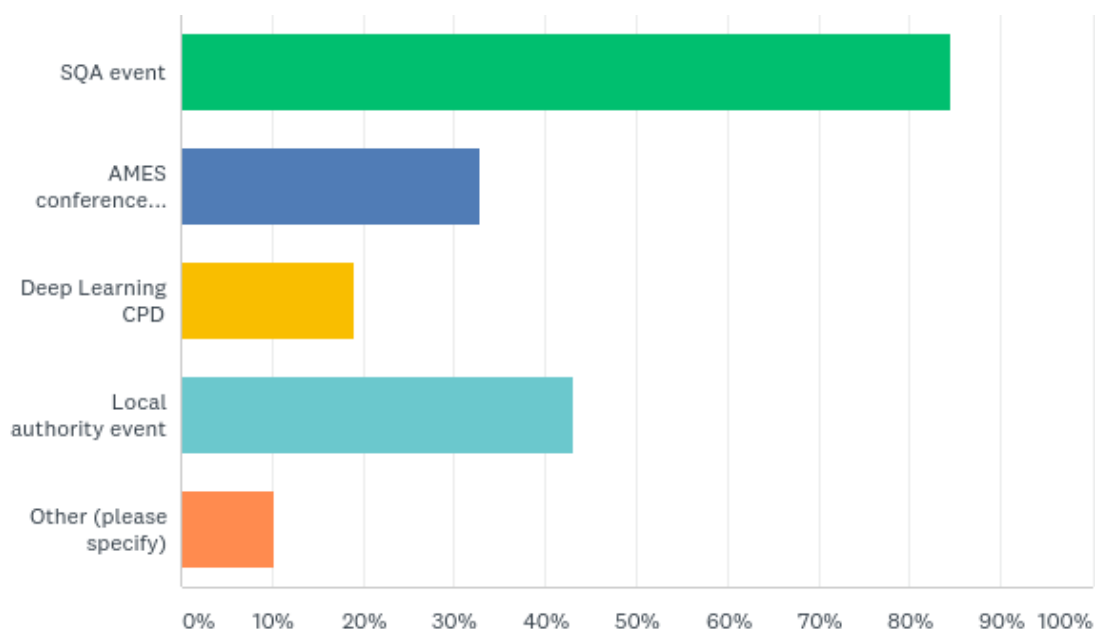
#### **Survey Results**

There were 60 responses, all from schools. The following summarises the responses to questions 4-16.

**Q4. Which of these SQA Media professional development events have you attended?**

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
SQA event	84.48%	49
AMES conference session on SQA Media	32.76%	19
Deep Learning CPD	18.97%	11
Local authority event	43.10%	25
Other (please specify)	10.34%	6
Total Respondents: 58		

*Table 1: SQA Media professional development events attended by respondents*



*Figure 1: SQA Media professional development events attended by respondents*

Teachers of media have set up their own self-help groups using Facebook and Edmodo and it is likely that these informal groups have been invaluable. Unfortunately, our survey did not cover this.

**Q5: How do you rate the quality of these events? (5-star highest rating)**

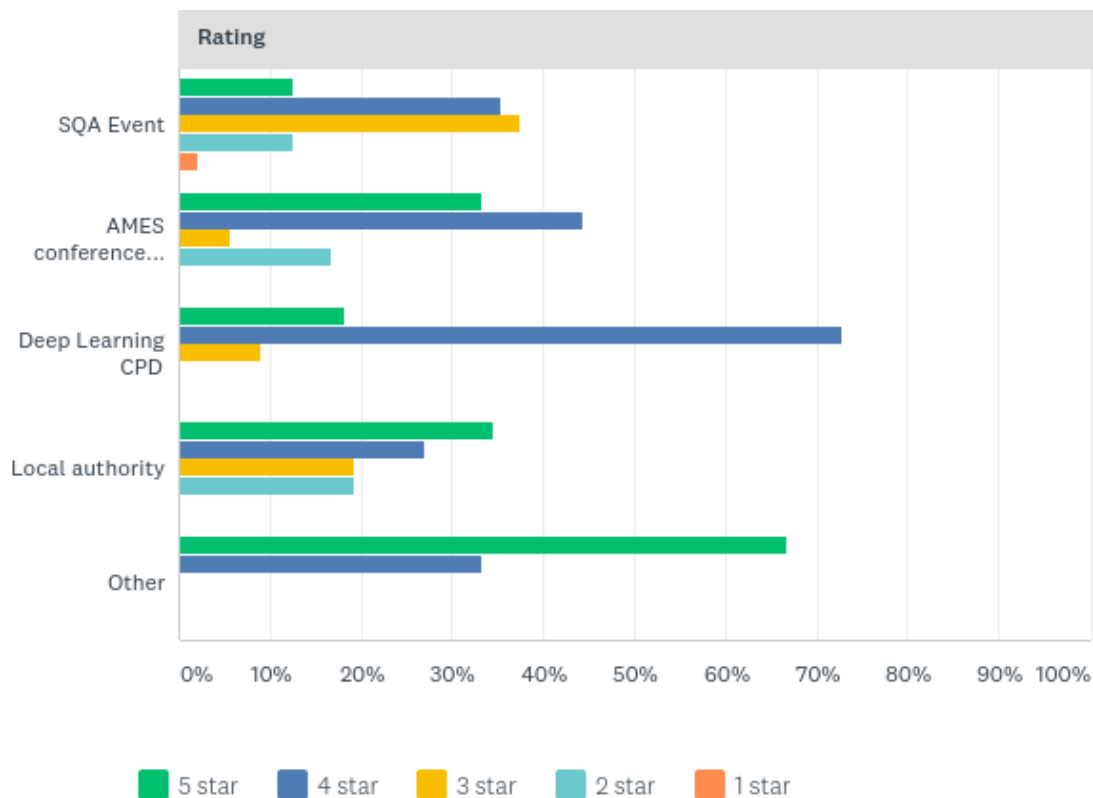


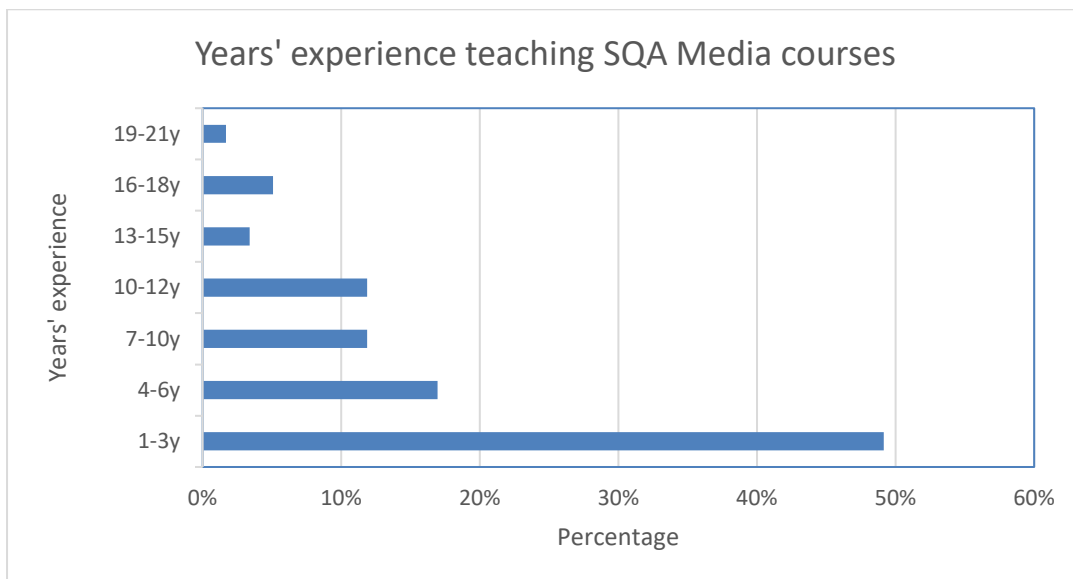
Figure 2: Respondent ratings of SQA Media professional development events

Teachers have had access to recent professional learning from a range of sources and the average rating for these on a 5-point scale (5: highest) is as follows:

Source	Percentage responding	Average rating (max 5)
SQA	80%	3.4
Local authority	43%	3.8
AMES	30%	3.9
Deep Learning	18%	4.1
Other	3%	4.7

Table 2: Respondent mean ratings of SQA Media professional development events

**Q6: How many years have you been presenting SQA Media/Media Studies qualifications?**



*Figure 3: Respondents' years of experience delivering SQA Media/Media Studies courses*

The mean number of years respondents have been delivering SQA Media/Media Studies courses is 5.6 years. However, the distribution of experience is heavily skewed towards inexperienced teachers (nearly half have been teaching 1-3 years).

The main aim of the survey was to see whether the discontent of a few was more widely shared. The four main questions were aimed at the 2017 diet and asked respondents to rate these statements on a 5-point scale:

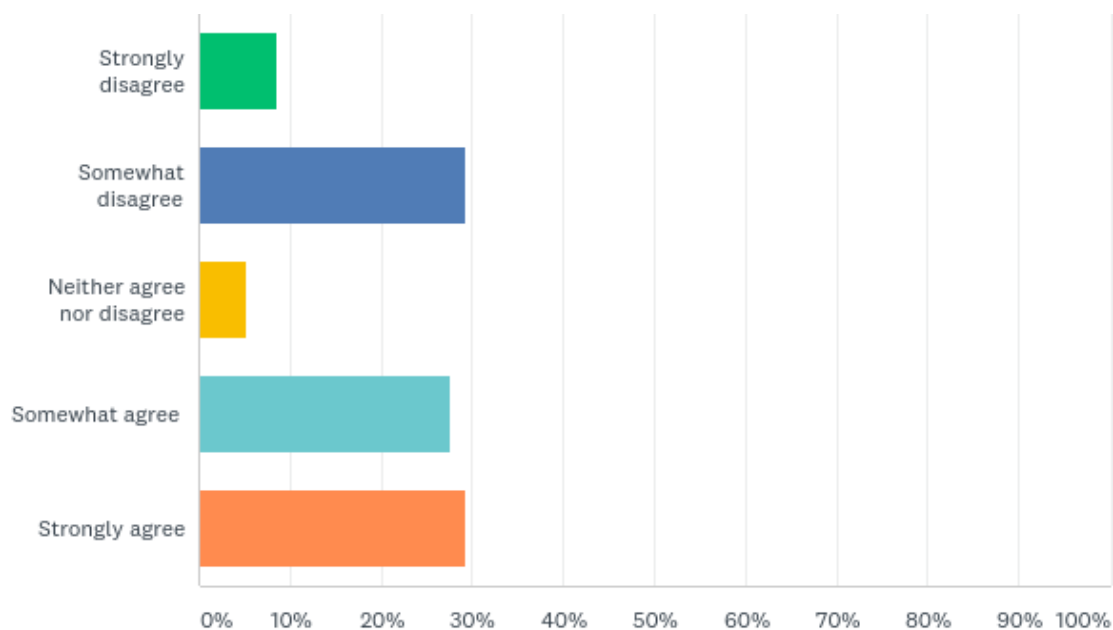
- Q7. "National 5 Media attainment broadly matched the expected attainment."
- Q8. "Students' attainment broadly matched their attainment in other National 5 subjects."
- Q9. "Higher Media attainment broadly matched the expected attainment."
- Q10. "Students' attainment broadly matched their attainment in other Higher subjects."

**Q7: Please rate your response to this statement about National 5 Media attainment in your centre: "National 5 Media attainment broadly matched the expected attainment."**

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly disagree	8.62%	5
Somewhat disagree	29.31%	17
Neither agree nor disagree	5.17%	3
Somewhat agree	27.59%	16
Strongly agree	29.31%	17
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>58</b>

*Table 3: Respondents' perception of National 5 Media attainment*

Ignoring 'Neither agree or disagree', the ratio of percentage disagreeing to percentage agreeing is 38:57. (cf. Higher, 56:31; page 7)



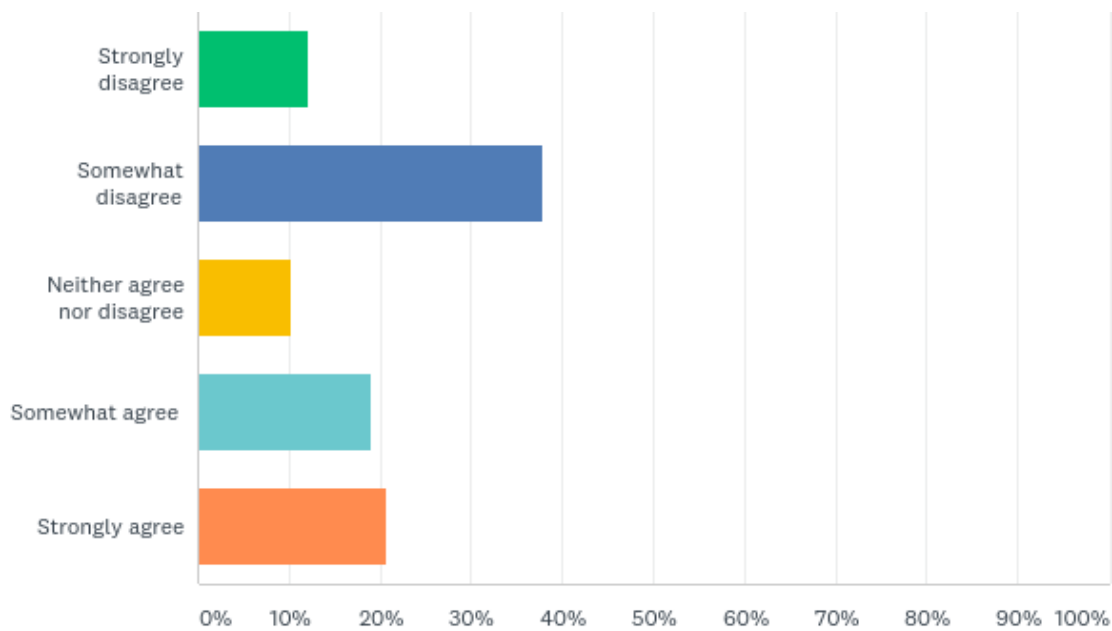
*Figure 4: Respondents' perception of National 5 Media attainment*

**Q8: Please rate your response to this statement about National 5 Media attainment in your centre: "Students' attainment broadly matched their attainment in other National 5 subjects."**

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly disagree	12.07%	7
Somewhat disagree	37.93%	22
Neither agree nor disagree	10.34%	6
Somewhat agree	18.97%	11
Strongly agree	20.69%	12
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>58</b>

*Table 4: Respondents' perception of National 5 Media attainment cf. other subjects*

Ignoring 'Neither agree or disagree', the ratio of percentage disagreeing to percentage agreeing is 50:40. (cf. Higher, 57:20, page 8)



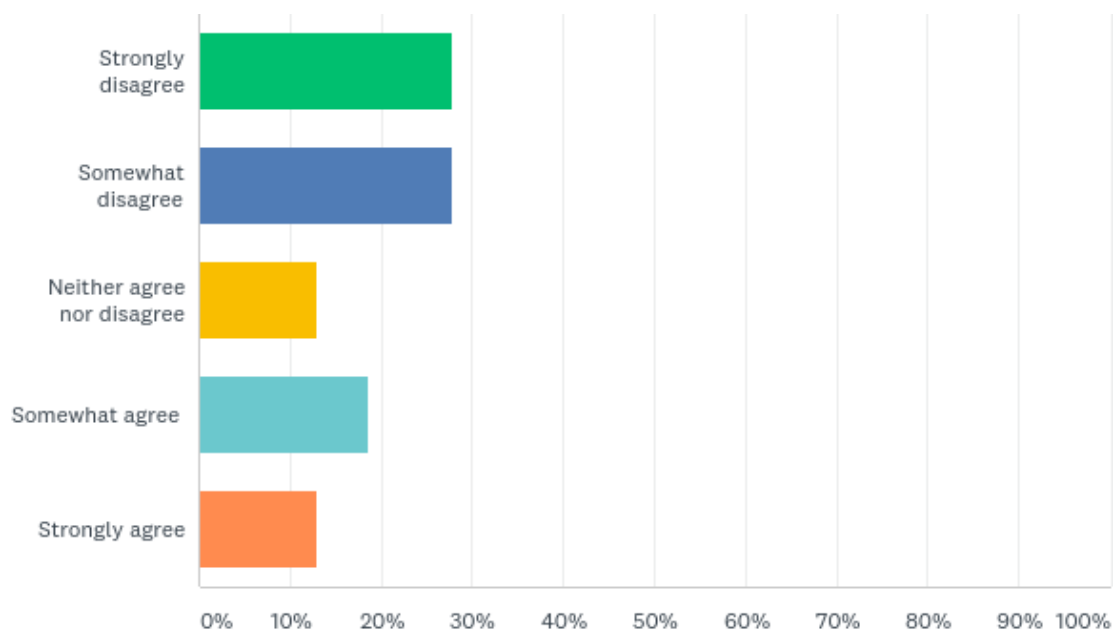
*Figure 5: Respondents' perception of National 5 Media attainment cf. other subjects*

**Q9: Please rate your response to this statement about Higher Media attainment in your centre: "Higher Media attainment broadly matched the expected attainment."**

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly disagree	27.78%	15
Somewhat disagree	27.78%	15
Neither agree nor disagree	12.96%	7
Somewhat agree	18.52%	10
Strongly agree	12.96%	7
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>54</b>

*Table 5: Respondents' perception of Higher Media attainment*

Ignoring 'Neither agree or disagree', the ratio of percentage disagreeing to percentage agreeing is 56:31. (cf. National 5, 38:57, page 5)



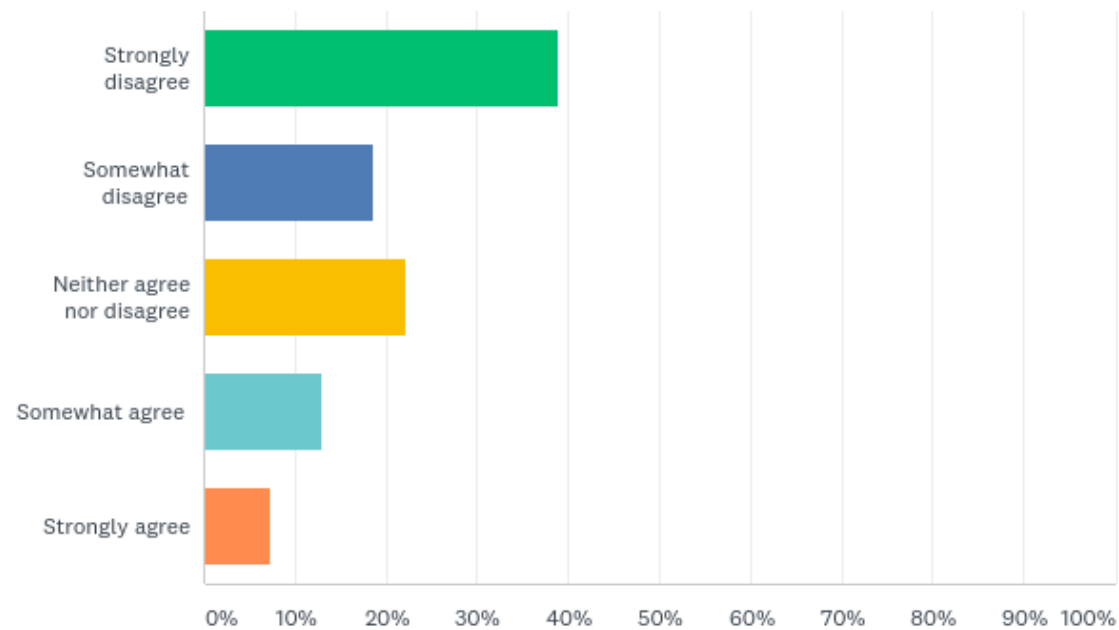
*Figure 6: Respondents' perception of Higher Media attainment*

**Q10: Please rate your response to this statement about Higher Media attainment in your centre: "Students' attainment broadly matched their attainment in other Higher subjects."**

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly disagree	38.89%	21
Somewhat disagree	18.52%	10
Neither agree nor disagree	22.22%	12
Somewhat agree	12.96%	7
Strongly agree	7.41%	4
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>54</b>

*Table 6: Respondents' perception of Higher Media attainment cf. other subjects*

Ignoring 'Neither agree or disagree', the ratio of percentage disagreeing to percentage agreeing is 57:20. (cf. National 5, 50:40, page 6)



*Figure 7: Respondents' perception of Higher Media attainment cf. other subjects*



The survey asked two questions about Understanding Standards (the SQA website which aims to help teachers understand SQA marking principles) and SQA update events.

**Q11: Please rate your response to this statement about SQA's Understanding Standards: "SQA's Understanding Standards gives me a clear picture of required student performance."**

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly disagree	33.90%	20
Somewhat disagree	25.42%	15
Neither agree nor disagree	5.08%	3
Somewhat agree	23.73%	14
Strongly agree	11.86%	7
TOTAL		59

Table 7: Respondents' perception of Understanding Standards

The ratio of percentage disagreeing to percentage agreeing is 59:36.

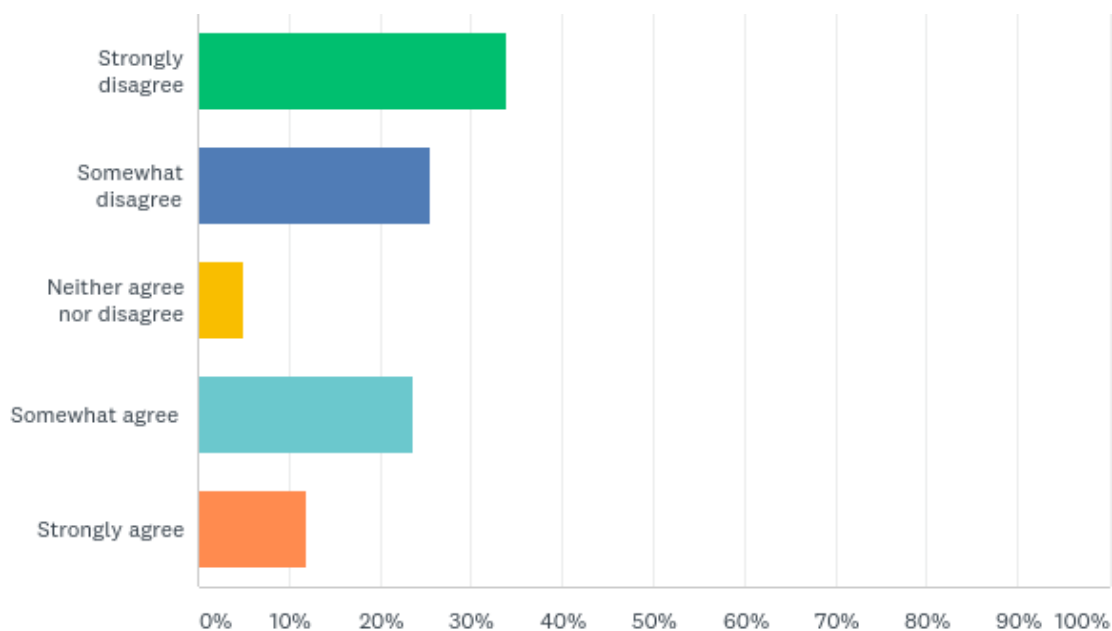


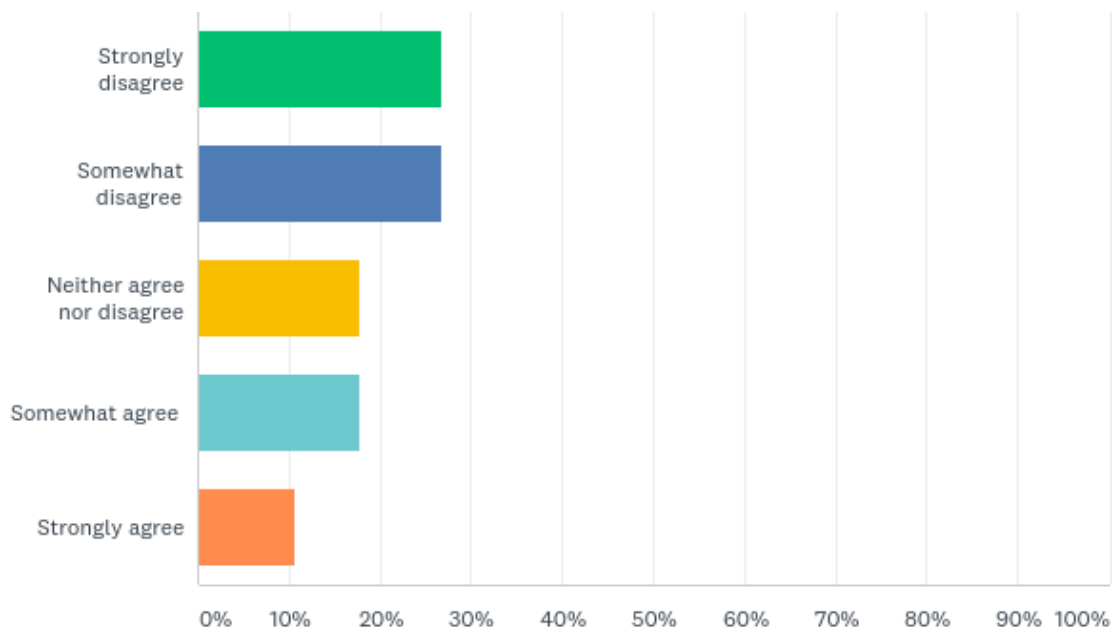
Figure 8: Respondents' perception of Understanding Standards

**Q12: Please rate your response to this statement about SQA's events: "SQA's events give me a clear picture of required student performance."**

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly disagree	26.79%	15
Somewhat disagree	26.79%	15
Neither agree nor disagree	17.86%	10
Somewhat agree	17.86%	10
Strongly agree	10.71%	6
TOTAL		56

*Table 8: Respondents' perception of SQA's Media events*

The ratio of percentage disagreeing to percentage agreeing is 54:29.



*Figure 9: Respondents' perception of SQA's Media events*

The responses to open-response questions 13 to 17 have been categorised. Single comments have also been omitted although there are useful observations there, some of which have been incorporated into the final discussion.

**Q13: How could SQA improve delivery of information in their events and in Understanding Standards?**

Clarify concepts in specification and clarify marking instructions	21
Examples of marked scripts with different grades & explanations of marks awarded	15
SQA staff should be less defensive, stop blaming teachers, listen & engage in dialogue	10
More advice, training, exemplars	4

**Q14: What is your opinion of the revised National 5 Media course in terms its meeting the needs of students in 2017?**

Positive opinion of revised N5	16
Concern over its difficulty	12
Welcome unseen element in examination	7
Difficult for pupils with literacy problems/rewards those who can write well	5
Course too broad	3
Examination too long for N5 pupils	3
Omits any mention of internet/new media	3

**Q15: What would you like to see in the revised Higher Media course in terms its meeting the needs of students in 2017?**

More detail and clarity in new specification	10
Make it less difficult	8
H must match N5 to enable bi-level teaching	7
Examination over-reliant on essay type question/break down questions	5
Make it less difficult	3

**Q16: Please add any other comments below.**

Results disappointing/erratic/hard to get A	13
Lack of quality CPD	4
Because of problems not teaching it any longer/warning pupils off	4

## SQA 2017 statistics

Table 9 shows the mean marks attained in the question paper and assignment components of Nation 5 and Higher Media in 2016 and 2017 (drawn from [https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/Component Marks 2017 National Mean Marks.xls](https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/Component_Marks_2017_National_Mean_Marks.xls)).

Mean marks	2017			2016		
	Question Paper (out of 50)	Assignment (out of 50)	Total %	Question Paper (out of 50)	Assignment (out of 50)	Total %
<b>National 5 Media</b>	25.4	31.5	56.9%	27.0	31.1	58.1%
<b>Higher Media</b>	21.7	26.6	48.3%	22.3	31.9	54.2%

Table 9: Mean marks for assessment components in 2017 and 2016 National 5 and Higher Media

Note the significant drop in the mean score for the assignment for Higher. This drop of 5.3 marks must have made a major contribution to the disappointing attainment at Higher. It seems a curious drop given that the marking instructions were the same in both years.

It is instructive to look at SQA statistics and compare Media attainment with English and Modern Studies (subjects which require skills closest to those required in Media) and what are often regarded as difficult subjects (Mathematics and Physics). Let's first compare their percentage pass rates and percentage A grades. The following tables are drawn from [https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/Attainment Statistics \(August\) 2017.xls](https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/Attainment_Statistics_(August)_2017.xls).

Table 10 compares the percentage pass rate and the percentage of A grades in National 5 Media with 4 other subjects. It then ranks the percentages from 1 to 48. A fractional rank may occur if there are several subjects with the same rank.

National 5	% Pass	% Pass Rank	%A	%A Rank
<b>Media</b>	67.2%	45/48	23.3%	45/48
<b>English</b>	87.2%	20/48	36.7%	26/48
<b>Modern Studies</b>	76.0%	37/48	32.1%	36/48
<b>Mathematics</b>	63.8%	46/48	31.1%	40.5/48
<b>Physics</b>	73.1%	39/48	31.7%	38/38

Table 10: Comparison of attainment in National 5 Media with 4 other subjects

We see that National 5 Media pass rate (67.2%) is very low compared with English (87.2%) and Modern Studies (76.0%) and comes between Physics (73.1%) and Mathematics (63.8%). The percentage of A grades (23.3%) is lower than all four subjects which have over 31%. Media ranks 45<sup>th</sup> out of 48 on both measures.

Table 11 compares the percentage pass rate and the percentage of A grades in Higher Media with 4 other subjects. It then ranks the percentages from 1 to 45. A fractional rank may occur if there are several subjects with the same rank.

Higher	% Pass	% Pass Rank	%A	%A Rank
Media	59.8%	45/45	12.2%	44/45
English	77.3%	24/45	24.7%	32/45
Modern Studies	74.3%	31/45	31.9%	17/45
Mathematics	74.0%	32/45	31.4%	18/45
Physics	75.9%	27/45	28.1%	27/45

Table 11: Comparative attainment in Higher Media with 4 other subjects

We see that Higher Media pass rate (59.8%) is very low compared with the other four subjects: English (77.3%) and Modern Studies (74.3%), Physics (75.9%) and Mathematics (74.0%). The percentage of A grades (12.2%) is lower than all four subjects which have double that rate or more. Media ranks 45<sup>th</sup> and 44<sup>th</sup> out of 45 on both measures.

These are shocking figures which back up teachers' observations from the AMES survey.

So, the question arises, should the grade boundaries not have been changed to massage the figures?

Tables 12 and 13 have been drawn from the 2017 grade boundaries at [https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/Grade\\_Boundaries\\_2017.xls](https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/Grade_Boundaries_2017.xls). The ideal grade boundaries for A and C grades are 70% and 50% respectively.

The table below shows the grade boundaries for the same subjects as in Tables 10 and 11. It then ranks these boundaries from 1-55 from highest to lowest. Note the number of qualifications differs from the previous National 5 table because of the inclusion of various languages. A fractional rank may occur if there are several subjects with the same rank.

National 5	C% grade boundary	C% rank	A% grade boundary	A% Rank
Media	50.0%	30.5/55	70.0%	34/55
English	50.0%	30.5/55	71.0%	20/55
Modern Studies	50.0%	30.5/55	70.0%	34/55
Mathematics	51.0%	15.5/55	73.3%	9/55
Physics	45.0%	55/55	68.0%	54/55

Table 12: Comparison of grade boundaries in National 5 Media with 4 other subjects

We see that the C and A grade boundaries for National 5 Media were set at the ideals of 50% and 70% and that Media was ranked in the middle for each setting.

Table 13 shows the equivalent table for Higher Media.

<b>Higher</b>	<b>C% grade boundary</b>	<b>C% rank</b>	<b>A% grade boundary</b>	<b>A% Rank</b>
<b>Media</b>	46.0%	48.5/49	64.0%	49/49
<b>English</b>	49.0%	38.5/49	68.0%	43/49
<b>Modern Studies</b>	50.0%	27.0/49	70.0%	29.5/49
<b>Mathematics</b>	50.8%	16.5/49	73.8%	6.5/49
<b>Physics</b>	47.5%	43.5/49	68.3%	42/49

*Table 13: Comparison of grade boundaries in Higher Media with 4 other subjects*

We see that the C and A grade boundaries for Higher Media were set at the at 46.0% (lower than 50%) and 64.0% (lower than 70%) and that the Media grade boundaries were ranked lowest out of all subjects!

So even with SQA easing Media grade boundaries to the maximum could not 'save' the disastrous attainment levels!

## Discussion

Overall, it seems safe to conclude that the assessment of National 5 and especially Higher Media is in a state of crisis. SQA cannot ignore either AMES' or its own evidence.

Statistical analysis of the data shows no significant correlation between perceptions of Higher attainment and factors such as years of teaching SQA Media or attendance at CPD events. Although a few teachers are ill-equipped to deliver SQA Media courses, erratic attainment afflicts both experienced and inexperienced teachers.

This is not a new problem but one that was evident in attainment levels within Intermediate and Higher Media Studies. Indeed, some experienced teachers are inured to it – it goes along with the territory ...

As personnel have changed over the past 18 years this would seem to point to systemic problems within the practices of SQA rather than with individuals employed by SQA or with Media teachers.

The AMES survey was flawed and would have benefited with a few more days of reflection. Alas, we had been asked to submit evidence to the Education Committee of the Scottish Parliament and so went ahead without critical reflection.

For example, it would have been better had we included questions about assessment e.g. the 2017 question paper and the structure of the question paper. Given the problem seems mainly to be with Higher, is there something within the 2017 examination which caused problems? It is worth looking closely at the 2017 paper.

### 1. Media Content in Context

It could be argued that ideas within a society are reflected in representations and other aspects of media content.

Analyse how this statement applies to media content you have studied. In your response you must:

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| (a) give detailed information about ideas in society which are reflected in the media content; | <b>10</b> |
| (b) analyse how representations reflect these ideas;   | <b>10</b> |
| (c) analyse how categories and/or narrative and/or language codes reflect these ideas.         | <b>10</b> |

## 2. The Role of Media

Producers of media content often claim that their main intention is to meet the need for entertainment, education and/or information. However, they are frequently criticised for being driven mainly by profit or promotion.

Discuss this with reference to media content you have studied. In your response you must:

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| (a) give detailed information or ideas about the role(s) of media referenced above, and discuss this by giving some opinions, arguments or conclusions about it; | <b>10</b> |
| (b) give specific examples from media content which illustrate your information, your ideas or your discussion.  | <b>10</b> |

Overall the paper seems to give undue emphasis to the society/role of the media aspects (30 out of 50 marks in question 1a and 2). Question 1 starts with society then moves to representations and finally to other textual aspects. This is counter to the inductive approach used by many teachers in which you work from the text to the institution/audience and then to more abstract analysis of social context.

Students generally find textual analysis more straightforward than analysing social shaping or influence. Consequently, it may be that this 'difficult' start to the paper was in part responsible for the poor results relative to National 5.

Several teachers (and their pupils) have commented on the perceived difficulty of Higher Media compared to other subjects and analysis of SQA data provides conclusive evidence of this. A number think that the exclusive use of 20/30-mark essay-type questions is unfair (even though they are structured into 10-mark chunks). The lack of choice also does not allow students to select a question which will best reflect their knowledge and skills. Several teachers have complained about the inflexible use of key aspects in the marking instructions.

So, in the revision of Higher it will be worth considering a different structure for the examination as well as the marking instructions.

There seem to be several urgent questions that the National Qualifications Support Team for Media need to address:

- Can the Higher Media paper be carefully constructed and vetted to ensure that the 'difficulty arc' is from straightforward to complex and reflects the 'teaching arc' from text to context?
- Can the Higher examination start with a series of shorter questions which ease pupils into the paper?
- Can some element of choice be offered for essay-type questions?
- Should the paper include an 'unseen' element which progresses from the print analysis element at National 5?
- If so, should it be moving image? If so, what are the practical difficulties? If so, what support might be provided in the examination (e.g. numbered series of frames from the



sequence with dialogue/description of sound which can be referred to in the student's analysis)?

- Can the course/examination include internet-based media so that it reflects 21<sup>st</sup> century networked, mobile digital media as well as traditional mass media?
- Given we seem to have created a subject which is very difficult to teach, learn and assess, should Media not be allowed to come out of the 'lockstep' revision process of national qualifications? For example, should we redesign the Higher Media as suggested above, then revisit National 3-5 the following session?

It will also be necessary to address professional development. Few teachers teaching Media have any media-related qualifications in their degree. Nearly 50% of Media teachers are relatively inexperienced. A few even have invaluable experience of working in the media and creative industries but find the media studies terminology off-putting. It would be invaluable, therefore, to provide a handbook which explains key media concepts, relating them to both professional practice and to the SQA Media assessment components.

Given that there is a crisis in the subject, there is a need to reconsider the conduct of SQA subject updates. It may be necessary to redesign them rather than follow the standard format of other subjects. For example, it would be useful to allow teachers to access exemplar marked scripts prior to events thus giving time for critical reflection. Also, it might be useful to double the number of events: one on the written examination and one on the assignment with practitioners who have achieved high attainment outlining their approaches.

AMES has approached SQA regarding the creation of a PDA in media education. Progress on this seems to have ground to a halt, but we trust that this report might accelerate progress. Ideally, this would need to be supported by on-line resources so that teachers in remote areas can access training.

**Given the pressure that SQA officers are under, AMES believes that it is essential for the Scottish Government to provide funding for a development officer to oversee such provision.**

**AMES and its members helped construct the SQA Media courses. Eliminating its manifest flaws are the joint responsibility of SQA, AMES and teachers. AMES' criticism is intended to be constructive, to promote a productive dialogue which enables National and Higher Media to evolve into respected and popular qualifications.**

**Rick Instrell ([ames.scot@gmail.com](mailto:ames.scot@gmail.com)) on behalf of AMES management committee, 6 October 2017**  
Any statistical errors or omissions are the responsibility of the author.

*We welcome feedback on the report. Please address to Rick Instrell [ames.scot@gmail.com](mailto:ames.scot@gmail.com).*

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