



Association for Media Education in Scotland

AMES is a registered Scottish charity SC029408 (ames.scot)

AMES and SQA

Introduction

This report has been compiled at the request of the Scottish Parliament Education and Skills Committee in response to our publication on 9 August 2017 of [Media Education and Film Education in Scotland](#). It should be read in conjunction with the latter to gain a full understanding of the issues.

AMES (Association for Media Education in Scotland) was formed in 1983, and currently has nearly 100 members, a majority of whom teach in the Scottish secondary and further education sectors. AMES holds an annual conference and publishes the *Media Education Journal (MEJ)* twice a year. It has published 61 editions and is probably the longest surviving media literacy journal in the world. Its members serve as SQA qualification designers, examiners and markers. AMES also lobbies and cooperates with bodies such as Education Scotland, SQA, Creative Scotland and Ofcom on behalf of media education. It is funded by members' subscriptions and has no paid officials. It receives no external funding other than small conference grants from Scottish Film Education and Into Film, who also pay filmmakers to deliver workshop sessions at the conference.

AMES believes (in the words of leading media educationist [Cary Bazalgette](#)):

If media education is worth having, then everyone should have it.

Throughout our existence, our main aim has been to try to make media education a right for every Scottish pupil, believing that digital media literacy can contribute to lifelong learning, creativity and active democratic participation. AMES also believes that national qualifications should enable those with talent to find pathways into the media and creative industries.

AMES and SQA

In the 34 years of AMES' existence we think it is fair to say that, despite our members' involvement with the examinations procedures of SQA (and its predecessor body SEB), we have never felt a full sense of partnership as espoused in corporate plans (see for example, [SQA Corporate Plan 2017–](#)

[20](#)). It is important to note that we would make similar criticisms of other Scottish agencies (Education Scotland, Creative Scotland, Government Education and Culture departments and their predecessors) whether it be under Conservative, Labour or SNP governance.

A recent example of this comes with the recent publication of the AMES report on [Media Education and Film Education in Scotland](#). Other than the Education and Skills Committee, the only official response has come from Mark Reid, Head of Education at British Film Institute, who responded “how can we help?”. We have had no response so far from SQA, Education Scotland, Creative Scotland, the Education Secretary John Swinney or the Culture Secretary Fiona Hyslop. Based on AMES’ past experiences, this response pattern was totally predictable.

Since 2014, AMES has been trying to persuade SQA to develop national qualifications in Film as well as teacher Professional Development Awards for teaching media and film at any level of education and in any context. As requested by SQA, we conducted surveys which show strong teacher support for both. Three years later we still have no idea whether there is likely to be any progress on these. And our past experience gives us little comfort.

As is often the case in Scottish education, despite what we see as AMES’ compelling positive response to social, political, technological and economic change, our suggestions disappear into a ‘black hole’ of Scottish educational complacency.

Meanwhile, if we avert our eyes from Scotland’s backward-looking ‘event horizon’, we can gaze enviously at the achievements in media education of other countries such as the other nations of the UK (especially Northern Ireland), Denmark, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

The retarded nature of Scottish education used to be researched in detail by educational sociologists such as Andrew McPherson and his colleagues. Alas, educational research in Scotland has itself deteriorated so that researchers are more likely to be chasing government contracts than conducting incisive critiques of national education policies and actions. Once watchdogs; now lapdogs ...

Let us offer a modest assessment of how SQA practices inhibit progressive change.

First, there seems to be a constant churn of qualifications managers/officers. From AMES’ viewpoint, we are often unsure who’s in charge and who to approach. One suspects that the churn (as well as the demanding nature of remits) means that media and film never come to the top of the in-tray.

Alternative voices are usually excluded. In most qualification design teams, there are no academic or industry or pupil representatives to remind teachers of worlds and perspectives beyond the ‘black hole’. Consequently, we have the absurdity of the newly revised National 5 Media qualification which makes no mention of digital technology, the internet or social media. Depressingly, the AMES survey (see below) shows that most teachers are happy with the revision.

However, to SQA’s credit, AMES has been invited to send a representative to join the national qualification support team in Media, and the [AMES website](#) is cited in the useful links section of version 2.0 of the revised National 5 Media course specification.

Another means of exclusion is quite surreal. AMES has several former media teachers who deliver professional development in the subject. However, they are barred from attending SQA assessment events, webinars or accessing the Understanding Standards website because they are not employed by a presenting centre and so are deemed “security risks”! This is hardly a sound way to raise attainment in the subject.

The [SQA Corporate Plan 2017–20](#) states:

Three values — trusted, enabling, and progressive — underpin the way SQA works with learners, customers, partners, stakeholders, the wider public, and within the organisation itself.

AMES would be happy if SQA’s practices truly lived up to these values and worked with rather than against AMES and the teaching profession.

So how can we escape the black hole? Well to echo BFI’s Mark Reid, AMES is here to help. Whatever the problems, they are *our* problems: SQA, the profession, AMES, pupils, and the wider Scottish society, culture and industry. Truly living up to the promise of partnership would be a good start.

AMES survey on attainment in National 5 and Higher Media

After 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 result 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".

On 12 August, AMES decided to conduct an online survey, emailing all examination centres, and these are the interim results as of 28 August. There are many comments which will take some time to analyse. A full report will follow in October and will be circulated to interested parties.

So far there have been 53 responses, all from schools. On average, respondents have been delivering SQA Media/Media Studies courses for 5 years.

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

Source	Percentage attending	Average rating (max 5)
SQA	82%	3.5
Local authority	43%	3.7
AMES	33%	3.9
Deep Learning	16%	4.0

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.

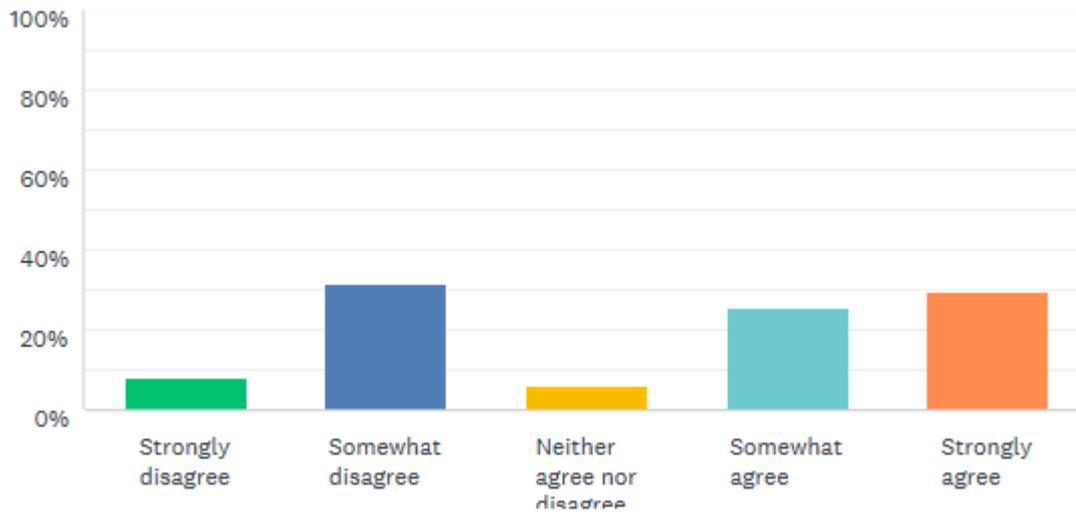
The main aim of the survey was to see whether the discontent of a few was more widely shared. The four main questions were aimed at the 2017 diet and asked respondents to rate these statements on a 5-point scale:

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

The interim results for these are shown below:

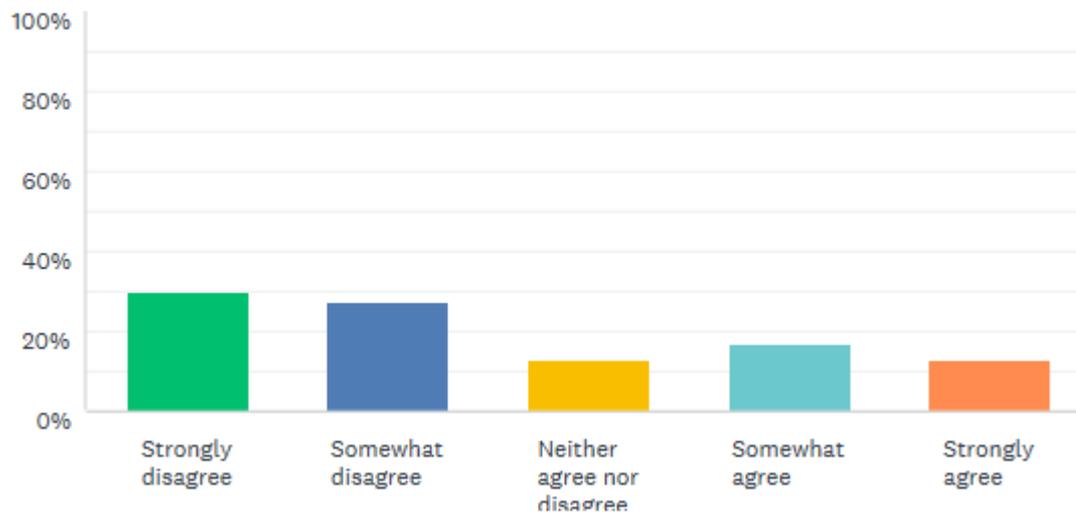
"National 5 Media attainment broadly matched the expected attainment."

Ignoring 'Neither agree or disagree', the ratio of percentage disagreeing to percentage agreeing is 39:55.



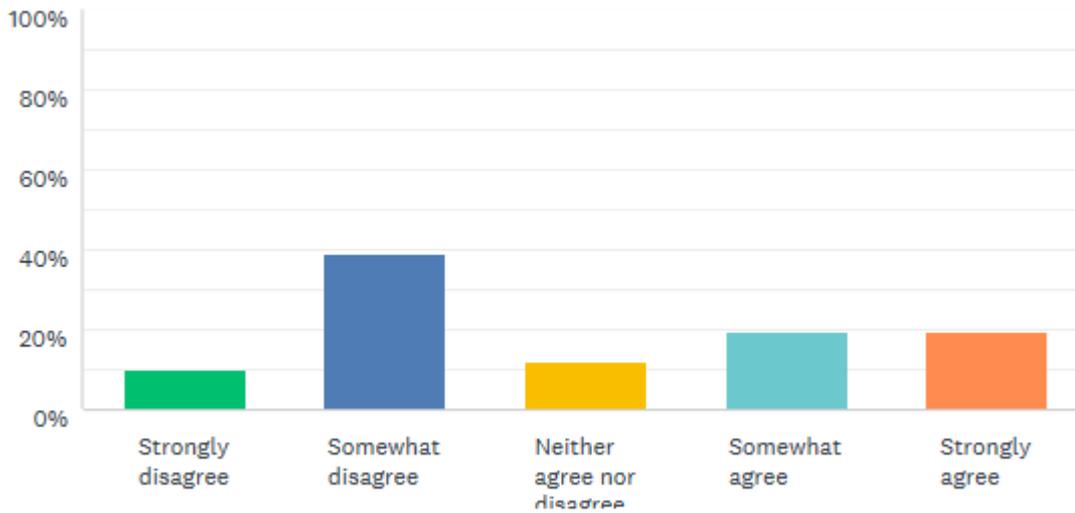
"Higher Media attainment broadly matched the expected attainment."

The ratio of percentage disagreeing to percentage agreeing is 57:30.



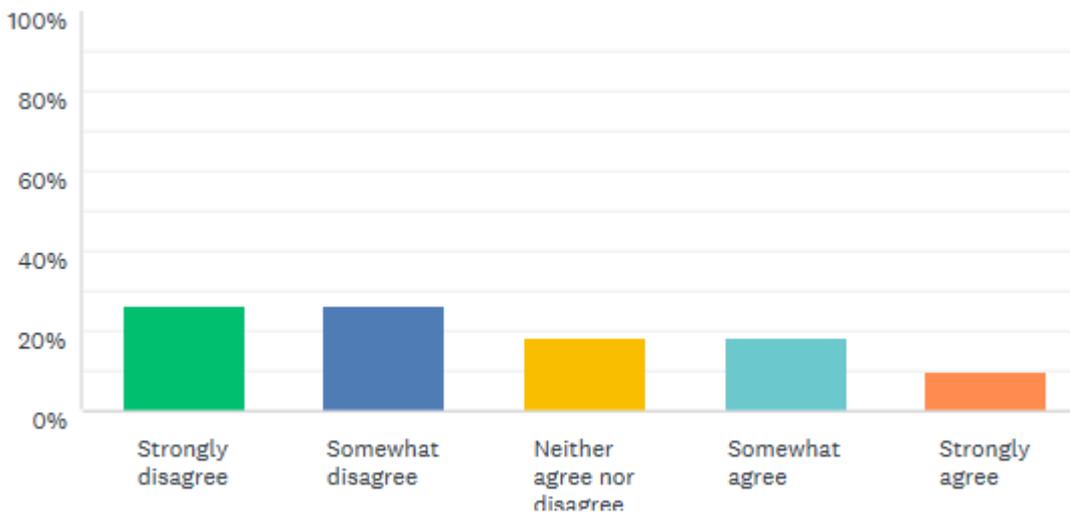
"Students' attainment broadly matched their attainment in other National 5 subjects."

The ratio of percentage disagreeing to percentage agreeing is 50:39.



"Students' attainment broadly matched their attainment in other Higher subjects."

The ratio of percentage disagreeing to percentage agreeing is 60:37.

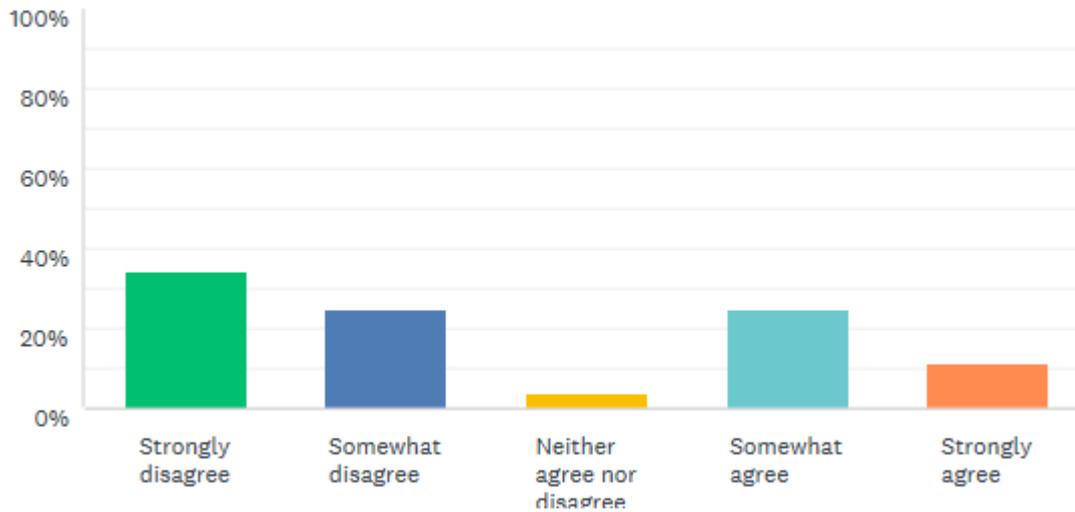


The survey asked two further questions about Understanding Standards (the SQA website which aims to help teachers understand their marking principles).

The interim results for these are shown below:

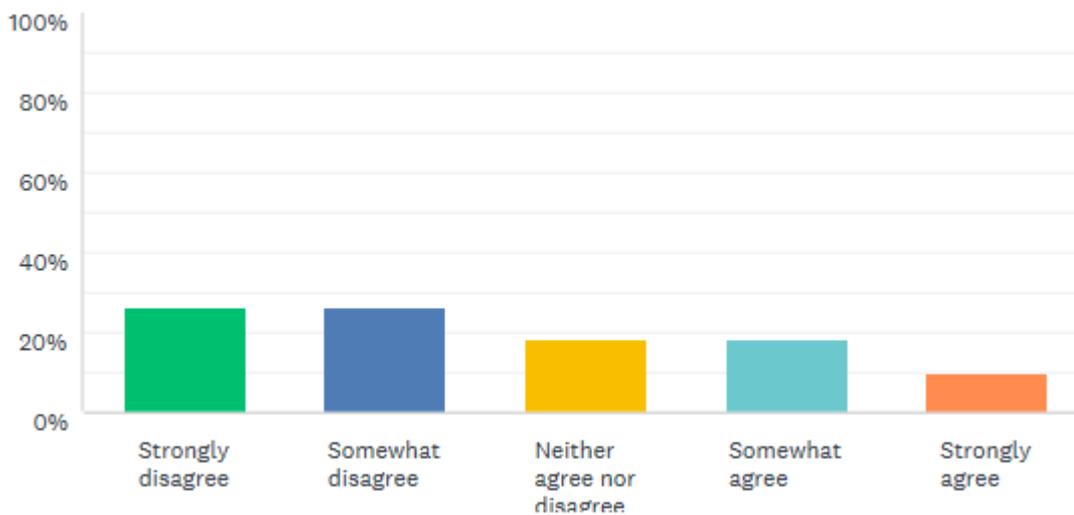
"SQA's Understanding Standards gives me a clear picture of required student performance."

The ratio of percentage disagreeing to percentage agreeing is 60:37.



"SQA's events give me a clear picture of required student performance."

The ratio of percentage disagreeing to percentage agreeing is 53:29.



Interim Findings

Overall, it seems safe to conclude that a problem lies with Higher Media results rather than National 5. Also, despite SQA's efforts with online and face-to-face advice on standards, many teachers question the fairness of the marking in Higher Media. Note that many of these teachers also teach English and find few problems there.

SQA must face up to this and not stick to its stock response: "look at Understanding Standards". This is *our* problem. We need to solve it *together* in a spirit of true partnership and mutual respect.

Rick Instrell (ames.scot@gmail.com) on behalf of AMES, 29 August 2017

Any errors or omissions are the responsibility of the author.