To: John Swinney MSP Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills  
James Dornan MSP Convenor of Education and Skills Committee  
Dr Janet Brown SQA Chief Executive  
Dr Gill Stewart SQA Director of Qualifications Development  
SQA Media Principal Assessor

We write to convey our concerns regarding the worrying drop in attainment in the Higher Media cohort of 2016-17.

As you are no doubt aware attainment this year dropped to 59.8% (Grade A-C) from 67.5% in the 2015-16 exam diet. Superficially this may seem insignificant but when the figures are broken down our cause for concern becomes clearer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grade A</th>
<th>% of cohort</th>
<th>Grade B</th>
<th>% of cohort</th>
<th>Grade C</th>
<th>% of cohort</th>
<th>Grade D</th>
<th>% of cohort</th>
<th>No Award</th>
<th>% of cohort</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>-9.4</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>+2.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>+2.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>+5.4</td>
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A brief analysis of the results from 2016 and 2017 shows a shift in attainment towards the bottom end of the awards scale. There has been a sharp increase in No Awards and the number of A grades awarded has almost halved.

As Media teachers we are both shocked and confused by this sudden drop and we are concerned about the potential damage this may cause to the reputation of the subject nationally. Our concerns lie in two areas: the marking of coursework and examinations and the disparity between standards conveyed (through Understanding Standards materials) and standards applied at the centre.

Across the country we are seeing results far below the grades predicted for our students. Experienced teachers, who have been active participants in Media CLPL across Scotland, are seeing cohort pass rates fall from, for example, 86% (Grade A-C) to 50% in one year. A startling drop of this nature cannot solely be attributed to the teacher and their cohort: we believe this is symptomatic of a larger issue within the assessment of Media. Many of us use exemplars of work from candidates who have been successful in previous years: this allows our students to model their own
responses on these whilst knowing that they are meeting the standard set by the SQA. Similarly, the use of exemplars from the Understanding Standards material is commonplace and as practitioners we have assumed this material to be an accurate reflection of the standards applied during the SQA marking process. In light of recent results we are concerned that this is not the case. Work that classroom teachers have assessed, with close reference to the standard, is being judged by the SQA as being of a much lower standard. The Higher Media Coursework Assignment is worth 50% and students spend a great deal of time on the creation of this. It is common practice for teachers to informally assess this work and use it as part of their grade predictions. There have been numerous instances across different schools where teacher predictions have been 10 or more marks off that which was finally awarded by the SQA. We do not understand how this can happen. Teachers are following the established rubric, using high-achieving exemplars of their own and exemplars distributed by the SQA - an established process such as this should not allow for such glaring discrepancies. This also appears to be the case in the Course Examination where numerous centres have found that traditionally high-achieving candidates (for example: achieved 8 National 5s in S4, 5 Highers in S5, CAT score of 119, predicted A in Higher Media) have achieved a grade well below measured, professional expectations.

Following the publication of results on 8th August, centres contacted the SQA directly to raise concerns. We were told “keep using Understanding Standards”, “become a marker” and “you could pay for a Performance Review”. One colleague was also told that the SQA had predicted a 59% pass rate so there was nothing wrong with the results. It was also suggested that, despite the issue being with the entire cohort, the centre could pay for a remark of each paper. These generic suggestions offer no answers to the questions we have posed and neither do they offer a solution for those candidates relying on the qualification for entry into Further Education.

The importance for Media education in Scotland cannot be denied and the SQA should be concerned by these falling pass rates and the irregularities between teacher and centre marking. As Rick Instrell of AMES stated in the recent paper “Media Education and Film Education in Scotland”: “…despite Curriculum for Excellence’s recognition of media literacy and film literacy within its future-proofed definition of literacy, media and film education remain on the margins in schools.”. Addressing the irregularities present within SQA Media will allow teachers to present students with confidence, it will facilitate the growth of Media as a viable subject in Scottish schools and it will provide students with the literacy skills necessary in the 21st century. Wendy Elrick of AMES, in a recent interview with BBC Radio Scotland, drew attention to the uptake of Media in Scotland and expressed all of our concerns that it is less than 3% of the uptake of English at Higher level. Why are we, in Scottish Education, falling so far behind our counterparts in the rest of the UK when it comes to providing Media opportunities for our young people?

Many of us in the Media teaching community have come to this as a second subject. We have specifically chosen to invest our time in providing what we believe to be a valuable opportunity for our learners and we do not wish to see this damaged by a poor reputation as an unreliable subject. We are committed to the development of Media in Scottish Education and believe that this can be enhanced in the following.
ways: a thorough review of Understanding Standards material in light of this year’s results and an investigation into the marking of Higher Media in 2017.

The majority of practitioners firmly believe that Higher Media attainment this year has not matched predicted attainment or candidate attainment in other Higher subjects. We believe that more transparency and consistency, as outlined, will allow both students and practitioners to maximise the opportunities that Media can provide.

Collette Roddy - Principal Teacher of English/Teacher of Media, Musselburgh Grammar School

Mhairi Johnstone – Teacher of English and Media, Musselburgh Grammar School

On behalf of a number of teachers including:

Wendy Elrick – Inverurie Academy, Association for Media Education in Scotland Committee Member

John Naples Campbell – Faculty Head, Dyce Academy (formerly Knightswood Secondary School, Glasgow)

Alison Steel – Berwickshire High School, Duns

David Beckett – CL Expressive Arts, Bell Baxter High School, Cupar

Lisa McKenzie – Newbattle Community High School

Colin Wylie – Balwearie High School

Louise Sedgewick – St Margaret’s Academy, Livingston

John Cawley – Whitehill Secondary School, Glasgow

Olivia Porteous – Lochgelly High School

Eddie Gaines – Bell Baxter High School, Cupar

Neil Winton – Perth High School