Setting the Grade
SQA’s awarding procedure
What is awarding?

After all exams and coursework are complete and marked, we decide on grade boundaries. This process is called awarding. Awarding is the process of deciding the marks needed to achieve a particular grade. The grades we use are A, B, C and D (and, if none of these are achieved, 'no award').

Does SQA report on grade boundary decisions?

Yes, each year after certificates have been sent out to candidates, we post information on our website to show what grade boundary decisions were made.

What are grade boundaries?

Grade boundaries are the minimum marks needed to be awarded a particular grade for a course. For example, a C boundary of 51 means you need to get 51 marks or more to get a grade C. We work hard to set exams and coursework tasks at the same level of demand each year. In practice, the difficulty level varies to some extent from year to year, due to the particular questions asked or the aspects of the course chosen for each exam. So each year we review the grade boundaries to ensure that exam results are fair and consistent for candidates across Scotland, and in comparison with previous years.
There are 7 possible types of assessment:

- assignment
- case study
- performance
- portfolio
- practical activity
- project
- question paper (exam)

What happens if a course assessment is found to have been easier or more difficult than intended?

It would not be fair to get a higher grade simply because the exam was easier than intended, or a lower grade because it was more difficult than intended. If this happens, adjustments are made to the grade boundaries to ensure fairness for all candidates, and that the national standard of the course is maintained. In other words, these adjustments are made to make sure that the minimum mark required to achieve an A, B, C or D represents the same standard of achievement from one year to the next.

Contact us

If you would like any further information on SQA’s awarding procedures, please contact our Customer Contact Centre:

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