

# Setting the Grade

## SQA's awarding procedure



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SQA has a responsibility to individual learners, and to the wider community, to ensure that the standard of our qualifications is set appropriately, and maintained over time and across courses. One method we use to do this is the procedure called 'awarding'.

### 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.

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There are 7 possible types of assessment:

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

### Who reviews the grade boundaries?

Senior SQA staff meet with subject specialists to decide on grade boundaries, to ensure comparability of standards from one year to the next. If the assessment is more – or indeed less – difficult than intended, the grade boundaries are adjusted to take account of this.

All decisions must be justified and supported by information collected during the awarding procedure.

### How are the grade boundaries decided?

We review a range of information such as:

- Feedback from markers
- Information on the marks achieved by candidates at course level, for each assessment component\*, and – in many cases – for individual questions
- Candidate answer booklets (for some qualifications)

This information allows us to establish the level of difficulty of the course assessment.

\* A course assessment can be an exam, coursework or a combination of both. We call these parts of course assessment the 'assessment components'.

### Are grade boundaries the same for every course?

No, each course has separate grade boundary decisions made for it each year. This ensures that, across all courses of the same level, the grade a candidate receives recognises the same standard of attainment across courses and from year to year.



### 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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