OXFORD AQA
INTERNATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Exams Support

Standard setting

Version 1 – Published February 2025

SETTING STANDARDS IN OXFORDAQA INTERNATIONAL GCE AND GCSE QUALIFICATIONS

We award the OxfordAQA International GCEs (AS and A-levels) and International GCSEs to the same standard as AQA qualifications.

To help us realise that aim, the same procedures are used as far as possible, although some variations may be necessary, especially in the initial series when entries are low. In the awards for OxfordAQA qualifications, senior examiners set the grade boundaries by reviewing OxfordAQA students' scripts to judge the quality of work, referring to boundary scripts in the domestic qualifications for comparison as necessary. For more detail on the procedures used in all domestic qualifications please see the ***Basic Guide to Standard Setting*** on the AQA website.

GCE QUALIFICATIONS AND THE UNIFORM MARK SCALE (UMS)

OxfordAQA International AS and A-level examinations are modular, allowing students to take units in different series. Papers for a particular unit may vary slightly in levels of difficulty. For example, a mark of 45 in one series (say, June 2018) may represent the same level of achievement as a mark of 48 in another series (say, June 2019). A method must, therefore, be found to put the marks from different series onto a common or uniform scale so that both 45 (from June 2018) and 48 (from June 2019) have the same value when contributing to an overall grade; this is the UMS.

HOW THE UMS WORKS

Table 1 refers to an AS unit marked out of 75 with a 20% weighting in a five-unit A-level with a maximum subject uniform mark of 500. The second column shows typical raw mark grade boundaries. These boundaries are determined by an awarding committee following each series. For example, the grade A boundary (i.e. the lowest raw mark for grade A) is 60.

The third column shows the uniform mark grade boundaries. Uniform mark grade boundaries are always at the following percentages of the maximum uniform mark for the unit or qualification: A 80%, B 70%, C 60%, D 50%, E 40%.

For a unit with 20% weighting in a five-unit A-level, the maximum uniform mark is 100 and uniform marks the range 80–100 correspond to grade A. This does not mean that the paper is marked out of 100 or that a student has to score 80% of the raw marks (80/100) to obtain grade A on the unit.

Table 1 AS unit with maximum raw mark of 75 and accounting for 20% of the assessment in a five-unit A-level: typical raw mark grade boundaries, together with the uniform mark grade boundaries.

Grade	Lowest raw mark in grade (max 75)	Corresponding uniform mark (max 100)
A	60	80
B	52	70
C	44	60
D	37	50
E	30	40
(N)	23	30

The notional grade N is used to ensure that, on conversion to uniform marks, raw marks have the same value just above and below the lowest available grade. The raw mark grade boundary for N is set as many marks below E as D is above E and the uniform mark grade boundary is set at 30% of the maximum mark.

In A level, the A* raw mark boundary is set on each unit as follows.

(i) Where the mark width from the grade A raw mark boundary to the maximum mark is more than twice the width from A to B, A* is the same width above A as B is below A.

(ii) Where the mark width from the grade A raw mark boundary to the maximum is less than or equal to twice that from A to B, A* is halfway between A and the maximum, rounded down where necessary to the nearest whole number below.

A 'cap' is also sometimes triggered above grade A (AS) or grade A* (A level) which, as with the notional grade N, ensures that, on conversion to uniform marks, raw marks have the same value just above and below the highest available grade. Students who achieve a raw mark equal to or higher than the 'cap' will obtain the maximum uniform mark available for the unit. In an AS unit the 'cap' is set twice as many marks above A as B is below A. In the above example a 'cap' is not necessary as it would exceed the maximum raw mark available (i.e. the 'cap' would be at a mark of 76). In an A-level unit, the cap is set the same number of marks above A* as A is below A*.

Consider the following students and their raw marks:
A student who scores 52 raw marks (the lowest raw mark for grade B) will receive a uniform markof 70 (the lowest uniform mark for grade B)
A student who scores 37 will receive a uniform mark of 50
A student who scores 56 (exactly half way between 52 and 60) will receive a uniform mark of 75 (exactly half way between 70 and 80).

When a student has completed all units, his/her uniform marks are added together. The overall subject grade is then determined from the student's total subject uniform mark remembering that the grade boundaries are such that: A = 80%, B = 70%, C = 60%, D = 50%, E = 40% of the maximum subject uniform mark.

GRADE BOUNDARIES AND RAW-TO-UNIFORM-MARK CONVERSION TABLES

When results are available after each series, the unit raw mark grade boundaries will be published alongside their associated uniform mark grade boundaries. In addition, unit-level conversion tables will be made available to enable the reader to determine easily which uniform mark each raw mark will convert to.

GCSE QUALIFICATIONS

In modular GCE qualifications, components can be taken at different times during the course, and grade boundaries are set for each component separately. Because of this, as explained in the previous section, AS and A-level qualifications require the use of uniform marks. OxfordAQA International GCSEs are linear, meaning that students take all of the assessments in the same exam series and the use of uniform marks is not required. Instead, students are given a single overall grade for the subject. However, we can provide 'notional grade boundaries' for individual components in linear qualifications for illustrative purposes only.

A GUIDE TO NOTIONAL COMPONENT GRADE BOUNDARIES

Although grades for individual components in linear qualifications do not affect results, it can be useful for students and teachers to see how the overall subject grade was achieved. The grade boundaries given for each component are known as 'notional grade boundaries' as they are for illustrative purposes only.

The notional component boundaries do not always add up to the subject grade boundaries. The example below explains how this might happen.

	Max mark	**9**	**8**	**7**	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
Subject	100	93	86	80	70	60	50	40	30	20
Component 1	50	46	42	38	33	29	25	20	15	10
Component 2	50	47	44	42	36	30	25	20	15	10

The columns for grades 9 and 8 are shaded and will be explained later.

In this example, the subject boundary mark for a grade 6 is 70 (out of 100). The notional component boundary marks for a grade 6 are 33 out of 50 for Paper 1, and 36 out of 50 for Paper 2. These add up to 69 and not 70 which is the subject grade boundary. Similarly, the component grade boundaries for grade 5 add up to 59 and not 60. Why is this?

The reason is that there are rules that we must follow for setting the subject boundary marks for 6, 5, 3 and 2, based on the grade boundaries for 7, 4 and 1. Grades 7, 4 and 1 are known as 'judgemental' grades, and the awarding committee for each subject sets these by looking at students' work. The 6, 5, 3 and 2 boundaries are then set arithmetically so that they fall as evenly as possible between the judgemental boundaries.

In this example, there are 30 marks between the subject boundary for grade 7 (80) and the subject boundary for grade 4 (50). The 6 and 5 boundaries are set at 10-mark intervals because 30 divided by 3 equals 10.

If the difference between the 7 and 4 boundaries is not exactly divisible by three, the remainder of the marks are allocated to each of the intervals between 7 and 6, and 6 and 5 – in that order.

So, let's apply this to Paper 1 in the example above.

1. The difference between the 7 and 4 boundaries is 38 minus 25 which equals 13.
2. 13 divided by 3 equals 4 with a remainder of 1.
3. This remainder is allocated to the interval between 7 and 6, so the grade 6 boundary is set 5 marks (4 + 1) below the 7 boundary, i.e. at 38 minus 5 which equals 33 marks.
4. There are no more remainders to use up, so the grade 5 boundary is set 4 marks below grade 6, i.e. at 33 minus 4 which equals 29 marks.

As shown here, applying the rules that are used to calculate subject grades 6 and 5 to each paper can lead to a situation where it is possible to get, for example, a notional '6' on both papers (33 and 36), but a subject grade of 5 (69).

The reason this happens is that the mark intervals between 7 and 4 on the separate papers may divide more or less evenly than the mark intervals between 7 and 4 on the subject overall.

GRADES 8 AND 9

Provisional subject grade 8 and 9 boundaries are set as follows.

(i) Where the mark width from the grade 7 boundary to the maximum mark is more than three times the width from grade 7 to grade 6, grade 8 is set so that it is the same width above grade 7 as grade 6 is below grade 7 and grade 9 is set so that it is twice the width above grade 7 as grade 6 is below grade 7.

(ii) Where the mark width from the grade 7 boundary to the maximum mark is less than or equal to three times the width from grade 7 to grade 6, grades 9 and 8 are set by dividing the width between the maximum mark and grade 7 by three. Where there is a remainder of one or more marks, one extra mark is added in turn to successive intervals, starting with the highest interval (i.e. the maximum mark to grade 9).

For the components, the grade 8 and 9 notional boundaries are set so that they are in the same relative position as the subject boundaries.

It is therefore important not to put too much emphasis on the notional component grades. The sole determinant of a student's grade on a linear exam is their total subject mark. It is not calculated by combining grades on the individual components.

GRADE BOUNDARIES

When results are available after each series, the subject and notional component grade boundaries will be published.

GET HELP AND SUPPORT

Visit our website for information, guidance, support and resources at **oxfordaqa.com**

OXFORDAQA INTERNATIONAL EXAMINATIONS
GREAT CLARENDON STREET,
OXFORD, OX2 6DP
UNITED KINGDOM
info@oxfordaqa.com