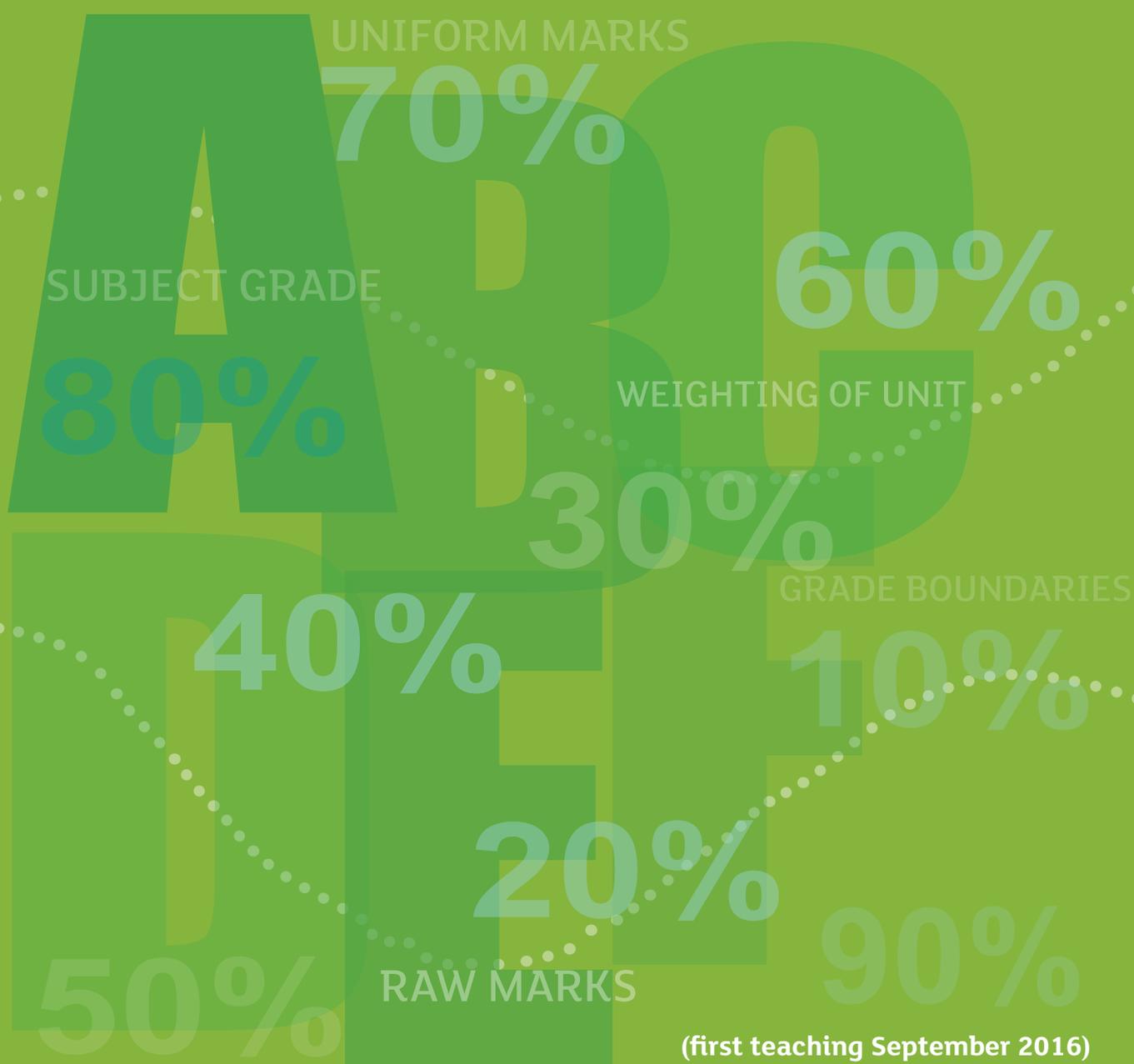


Setting Grade Boundaries and Awarding Grades in CCEA Unitised GCE Qualifications



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Background

Unitised qualifications are designed to be taken in 'chunks' or units. As a candidate sits each unit, the marks are accumulated. When the candidate cashes-in, the marks from each unit are aggregated (added up) and an overall subject grade awarded. Since exam papers can vary in difficulty from one examination series to the next, a common scale is used (called the uniform mark scale or UMS) to ensure candidates who sit an easier paper are not advantaged over candidates who sit a more demanding paper.

For most of CCEA's GCE qualifications, the total number of uniform marks (um) available in each qualification is 400. The number of uniform marks allocated to each unit in the qualification is determined by the percentage weighting of the unit. For example if a unit is worth 35% of the qualification then it is allocated a total of 140um (35% of 400um = 140um).

Table 1 shows the number of uniform marks allocated to each unit of a GCE qualification worth 400um.

| Unit | % Weighting of unit | Number of uniform marks allocated to unit |
|------|---------------------|---|
| 1 | 25% | 100 |
| 2 | 15% | 60 |
| 3 | 30% | 120 |
| 4 | 30% | 120 |
| | | Total = 400 |

Table 1

Setting Grade Boundaries in Units

1. For each unit, grade boundaries are initially set in 'raw' marks. The number of raw marks is the number of actual marks on the examination paper.
2. Key raw mark boundaries are set first. This is done using a combination of examiner judgement and statistical information. At GCE, the key grade boundaries are A/B and E/U. The other raw mark grade boundaries (B/C, C/D and D/E) are set using a calculation. Raw mark grade boundaries may vary year on year depending on the demand of the examination paper.
3. Once all the raw mark boundaries have been set, they are 'mapped' onto uniform mark boundaries. The uniform mark boundaries are set at fixed percentages. These percentages do not change year on year. At GCE the uniform mark boundaries are set at the following percentages:

| Uniform mark grade boundary | % of uniform marks |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| A | 80% |
| B | 70% |
| C | 60% |
| D | 50% |
| E | 40% |

Table 2

4. Once the raw mark boundaries have been mapped to uniform mark boundaries, each raw mark is converted to a uniform mark. Table 3 shows how this is done for a GCE unit worth 30%.

| GCE unit with a weighting of 30% | | |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Total raw marks in examination = 90 | | |
| Total uniform marks for unit = 120 (30% of 400um) | | |
| Unit grade boundary | Raw mark boundary | Uniform mark boundary |
| A | 68 | 96 (80% of 120 um) |
| B | 61 | 84 (70% of 120 um) |
| C | 55 | 72 (60% of 120 um) |
| D | 49 | 60 (50% of 120 um) |
| E | 43 | 48 (40% of 120 um) |

Raw to uniform mark conversion

61 raw marks maps to 84 uniform marks

55 raw marks maps to 72 uniform marks

$12\text{um} (84-72) \div 6 \text{ raw marks } (61-55) = 2$

Therefore the raw to uniform mark conversion for the raw mark range 56 to 61 is 1 raw = 2um

Similar calculations are carried out between other adjacent grade boundaries.

Table 3

5. For each unit candidates are awarded a 'notional' grade based on their uniform mark. For example a candidate who scored a uniform mark of 86 in the unit shown in Table 3 would be awarded a notional grade B.

Awarding Overall Subject Grades

When a candidate has completed all of the units for a qualification, the uniform marks achieved in each unit are aggregated (added up) to give a total uniform mark for the qualification. The candidate is then awarded an overall subject grade.

The subject level grade boundaries are set at the same percentage of uniform marks as the unit level uniform mark boundaries. The subject level boundaries do not change from one examination series to the next. Table 4 shows the subject level uniform mark boundaries for a GCE qualification with a total of 400 uniform marks.

| Subject Grade | Subject level uniform mark grade boundary (for a 400um GCE qualification) |
|---------------|--|
| A | 320 (80% of 400) |
| B | 280 (70% of 400) |
| C | 240 (60% of 400) |
| D | 200 (50% of 400) |
| E | 160 (40% of 400) |

Table 4

Table 5 shows the uniform marks achieved by a candidate in each of the 4 units of a 400um GCE qualification.

| Unit | Uniform Mark Achieved |
|------|-----------------------|
| 1 | 75 |
| 2 | 55 |
| 3 | 63 |
| 4 | 72 |

Table 5

The total uniform mark = $75 + 55 + 63 + 72 = 265\text{um}$. Table 4 shows that the C boundary at subject level is set at 240um and the B boundary is set at 280um. This candidate would therefore achieve a grade C at subject level.

Awarding the A* Grade at Subject Level

The A* grade is only awarded when candidates cash-in and their uniform marks for each unit are aggregated.

An A* grade will be awarded to candidates who achieve grade A overall and also achieve 90% or more of the maximum uniform mark on the aggregate of the A2 units.

