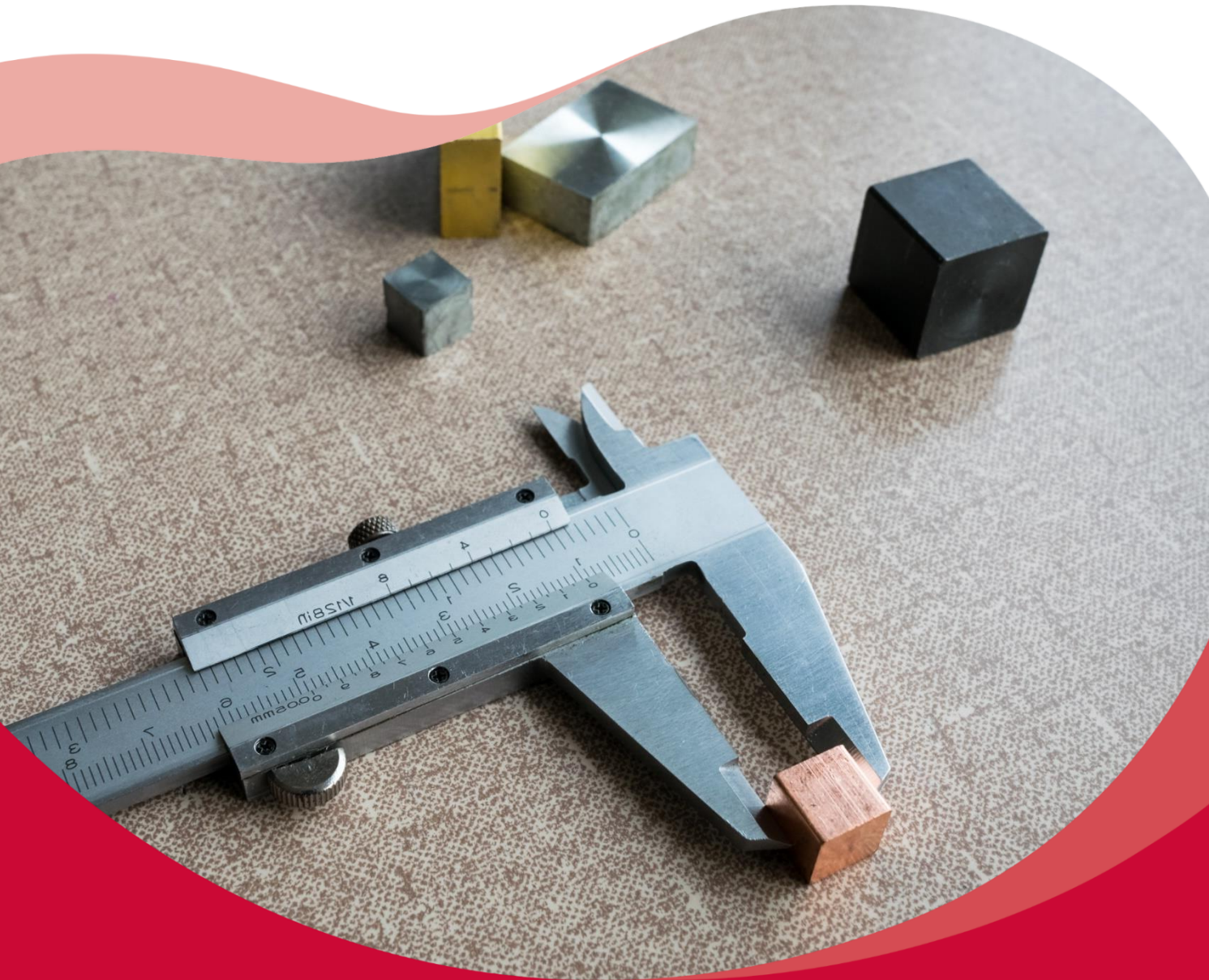




L-Università
ta' Malta

MATSEC
Examinations Board



Grade Awarding: Guidelines

MATSEC

2022

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 +356 2340 2814/5/6

 matsec@um.edu.mt

A. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

A.01. The awarding of grades is based on two judgements:

- a. a professional judgement based on the perceived and reported difficulty and ambiguity of the paper/questions and markers' consistency and experience;
- b. a statistical judgement based on the candidates' mean attainment and the distribution of raw scores per number of candidates along with a consideration of the percentage of candidates obtaining each grade in previous years.

For the purpose of these guidelines, the difference between the two shall not be emphasized.

A.02. The Chairperson will attend a grade awarding meeting which will be chaired by the chairperson of the MATSEC Examinations Board, or MATSEC's Executive Director (Mr. Pirotta) or Principal Area Officer for Assessment, Research and Development (Mr. Zahra). The respective Principal Subject Area Officer (PSAO) will also be present.

B. INITIAL QUESTIONS

- B.01. A set of questions are used to obtain some general information about the examination and candidates' performance and attainment. Such questions, based on professional judgement, include:
- a. Was the format of the papers/questions different from that of the previous year/s?
 - b. Did the number of candidates sitting for the examination vary considerably/unpredictably from that in the previous year/s?
 - c. Were there any problems/errors encountered by candidates during the examination?
 - d. Were the individuals involved in the marking panel different from those of last year/s?
 - e. Was the level of difficulty of the papers/questions different from that of the previous year/s?
 - f. Did markers find candidates' performance to be particularly better/worse than that in previous year/s?
- B.02. In large subjects where the answers to the above questions are almost invariably negative, the final distribution of grades should closely mimic that of the previous year/s.
- B.03. Apart from these questions, a number of statistical and technical considerations are analyzed at the beginning of the grade boundary meeting. These include:
- a. whether the awarding of grades to candidates is expected to differ considerably from that of last year should the same grade boundaries be adopted;
 - b. the consistency or lack of consistency in raw scores used as grade boundaries in previous years;
 - c. the consistency or lack of consistency in the distribution of grades in previous years;
 - d. a distribution of candidate scores to look for natural breaks¹.

¹ These are marks that no candidates or, in large subjects, a minority of candidates have obtained thus indicating a break between groups of candidates. Marking Excel sheets as distributed by MATSEC automatically plot the scores and show the gaps.

C. PROPOSING GRADE BOUNDARIES

- C.01. Based on the initial questions set above, a set of tentative grade boundaries are set.
- C.02. Special consideration is given to Grades 3 and 5 in SEC examinations and Grades C and E in MC examinations. Depending on the nature of the subject, marks obtained in components on the examination can be looked at separately to better inform cut-off points. Some examples could be:
- a. it could be unwise to award a Grade C in a language subject to a group of candidates who do not show a satisfactory competence in writing;
 - b. similarly, it could be wise to award a Grade E in a language examination at intermediate level to candidates who show, at least, mastery in speaking the language although attainment in the rest of the examination is not particularly satisfactory.
- C.03. When a syllabus states that candidates must satisfy the examiner in specific part/s of the examination, candidate attainment for these parts is to be looked at in more detail.
- C.04. Grade boundaries are obtained and, keeping in mind all the information hitherto scrutinized, the percentage distribution of grades is compared to that in previous year/s. Where the difference from previous years is 3% or less, no further action is needed. Where the difference is 5% or more a justification is required which can involve further discussion of the quality of the candidates' performance.

D. SEC SUBJECTS: SETTING EQUIVALENT GRADE BOUNDARIES FOR PAPER A AND PAPER B CANDIDATES

Grading differentiated examinations raises fundamental comparability problems: the different versions of the examinations typically examine different aspects of the subject with questions set at different levels of difficulty but common standards must apply for the award of each grade.²

- D.01. After proposing tentative grade boundaries for Paper A and Paper B candidates separately, it is important to assess the comparability of Grades 4 and 5 as obtained by candidates through the two different papers. This is done by comparing the average marks obtained in the common parts (Paper I) of the examination.
- D.02. This exercise might shed additional light on the performance of Paper A candidates and cause a change in the grade boundaries previously set for Paper A.
- D.03. The grade boundaries for Grades 4 and 5 for Paper B candidates are normally higher than those for Paper A candidates.
- D.04. Once grade boundaries are obtained, keeping in mind all the information hitherto analyzed, the percentage distribution of grades is compared to that in previous year/s.

E. FINAL PROCEEDINGS

- E.01. The chairperson of the marking panel is to check and confirm a printout of the distribution of marks by signing or initialing on each printed sheet.
- E.02. The chairperson of the marking panel, PSAO and chairperson for the grade boundary meeting confirm their agreement on the distribution of grades by signing the appropriate grade boundary form.

² Good, F. J. & Cresswell, M. J. (1988, p.265). Grade awarding judgements in differentiated examinations. *British Educational Research Journal*, 14(3), 263-281. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1500982.pdf?_seq=1469689091052.

F. LARGE CHANGES IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF GRADES

- F.01. Changes in the distribution of grades should be accounted for by referring to the 'Initial Questions' section or any other relevant data.
- F.02. In cases where the change is considerably large (depending on the nature and size of the subject), individual papers of candidates lying at the end of each grade may be compared with those of the previous year³ to ensure comparability of grades obtained by candidates along the years. This meeting would be attended to by:
- a. the chairperson of the marking panel;
 - b. the chairperson of the marking panel of the previous year (considering that this is different than that of the current year);
 - c. the responsible MATSEC Support Unit PSAO;
 - d. two of either the MATSEC Examinations Board chairperson, or MATSEC's Executive Director (Mr. Pirotta) or Principal Area Officer for Assessment, Research and Development (Mr. Zahra).

G. CHECKING

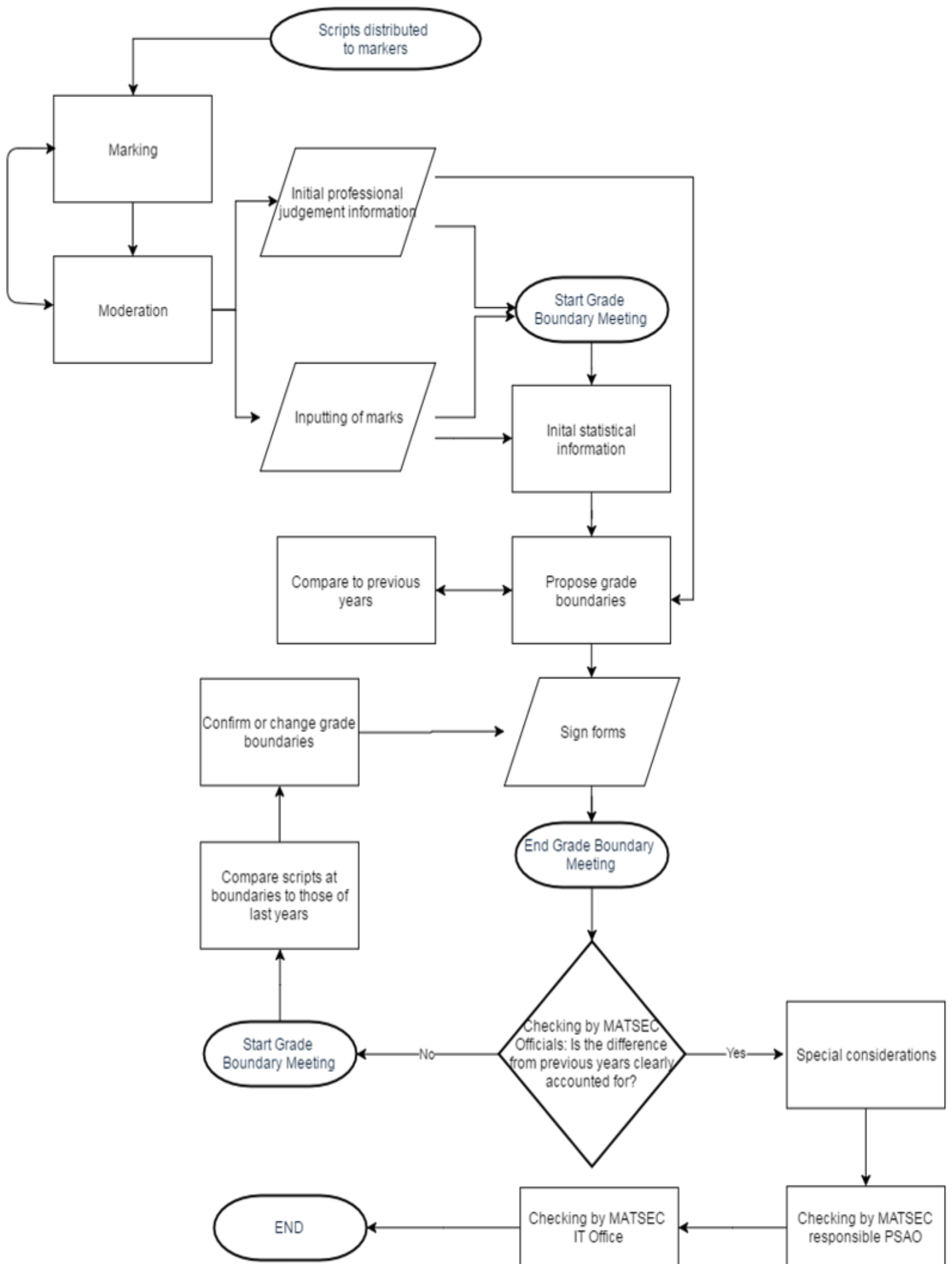
- G.01. Candidates granted special consideration are attended to individually by the subject PSAO as per agreement with MATSEC Executive Director and MATSEC Examinations Board Chairperson or with the MATSEC Examinations Board.
- G.02. Subject PSAO and IT Staff at MATSEC run further checks to confirm absent candidates and correct data inputting.

H. SUMMARY

- H.01. The process described above is summarized in the diagram on the following page.

³ Scanned copies of past examination scripts at each grade boundary are stored by MATSEC

MATSEC Regulations: Grade Awarding Guidelines



I. DIFFERENCES FROM OTHER BODIES

I.01. Ofqual⁴

- a. only decide on grade boundaries at A/B, C/D, and E/F (sometimes only A/B and E/F) and decipher the rest arithmetically⁵;
- b. determine the key grade boundary marks for each component separately. The component boundary marks, scaled as necessary to reflect the weighting for that component as detailed in the specification, are added to give unit boundary marks;
- c. convert marks to uniform marks such that the boundary for a grade appears to be identical from year to year.

I.02. A number of bodies review scripts after the grade boundaries have been set to confirm that the level is identical to that in previous years^{6,7}.

⁴ Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2010). *GCSE, GCE, principal learning and project code of practice*. Great Britain: Ofqual.

⁵ Scottish Qualifications Authority (2015). *A guide to setting grade boundaries* [version 1.1]. Glasgow, Midlothian: Scottish Qualifications Authority.

⁶ Pearson Education Ltd (2016). *Results and Certification: Understanding marks and grades* [webpage]. Retrieved from <http://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/results-certification/understanding-marks-and-grades.html>

⁷ AQA (2016). *How grades are awarded* [webpage]. Retrieved from <http://www.aqa.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/getting-the-right-result/how-exams-work/making-the-grades-a-guide-to-awarding>