T Levels: Notional boundaries for the Core Exam assessments (Paper 1 and Paper 2)

The Core component in T Levels consists of two subcomponents – the Core Exam and the Employer Set Project (ESP).

The Core Exam consists of two assessments (Paper 1 and Paper 2), **both assessments** must be taken in any given series that a student sits the Core Exam.

Students receive a grade for the Core Exam subcomponent as whole, and although there are no official grades for the individual assessments in the Core Exam, it can be useful for students and teachers to see how the Core Exam grade was achieved. The grade boundaries given for each assessment are known as 'notional grade boundaries', as they are for illustrative purposes only. Grade boundaries are the lowest mark with which a grade is achieved.

How are the notional paper boundaries for paper 1 and paper 2 of the Core Exam calculated?

Grades A and E are key boundaries. They are recommended by subject experts for the Core Exam using a range of evidence which includes looking at students' work. In order to recommend the key grade boundaries, subject experts will determine the lowest mark at which the relevant grade standard is demonstrated on each paper. These marks are the notional grade boundaries and are added up to determine the corresponding core exam grade boundary. For the A and E boundaries, the Paper 1 and Paper 2 boundaries add up to the corresponding Core Exam boundaries.

Grades B, C and D are arithmetic grade boundaries and are calculated based on the A and E key boundary recommendations. There are rules that all awarding organisations must follow for setting the Core Exam boundary marks for A*, B, C and D, based on the A and E Core Exam boundaries.

The B, C and D boundaries are set arithmetically so that they fall as evenly as possible between A and E. If the difference between the A and the E boundaries is not exactly divisible by four, the remainder of the marks are allocated to each of the intervals between the boundaries for A and B, B and C, and C and D – in that order.

The same principles (above) are used to calculate the notional boundaries for grades B, C and D for each of the papers individually, based on the notional A and E boundaries for

those papers. This does sometimes lead to scenarios in which the notional paper-level grade boundaries for these grades do not add up to the core exam grade boundaries.

The following example shows how the Core Exam and the notional paper boundaries are determined and why the arithmetic grade boundaries (B, C and D) may not always add up to the corresponding Core Exam boundaries.

Example

Sample Core Exam and notional assessment grade boundaries in a Core Exam

	Max mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E
Core Exam grade boundaries	200	180	160	140	120	100	80
			20 Marks	20 Marks	20 Marks	20 Marks	20 Marks
Paper 1 notional grade boundaries	100	87	75	65	56	47	38
			12 Marks	10 Marks	9 Marks	9 Marks	9 Marks
Paper 2 notional grade boundaries	100	92	85	74	63	52	42
			7 Marks	11 Marks	11 Marks	11 Marks	10 Marks

Grades A and E

The subject experts recommend marks at the key boundaries A and E for paper 1 and paper 2, which add up to the corresponding grade A and E boundaries for the Core Exam.

Grade A paper 1 notional boundary is 75 marks and Grade A paper 2 notional boundary is 85 marks.

75 + 85 = 160 marks which is the boundary mark for the Core Exam

Similarly, the notional grade E paper 1 and paper 2 boundary marks add up to the Core Exam E boundary mark (38+42 = 80 marks).

Arithmetic boundaries: B, C and D

There are 80 marks between the Core Exam boundary for grade A (160), and the Core Exam boundary for grade E (80). The B, C and D Core Exam boundaries are set at 20 mark intervals (80 ÷ 4 = 20), at 140, 120 and 100 respectively.

Using the B grade as an example, notional boundaries are calculated as follows:

Paper 1 grade A notional boundary is at 75 and Grade E notional boundary at 38, which gives a difference of 37.

37 ÷ 4 can be split into 36 ÷ 4 = 9 with remainder 1

The remainder 1 is allocated to the A-B interval, i.e the grade B boundary is set 10 marks lower than the grade A, i.e. the **Grade B** boundary is **65 marks**

Using the same principles for Paper 2, where the difference between notional Grade A and notional Grade E is 43 marks. 43 ÷ 4 can be split into 40 ÷ 4 = 10 with remainder 3.

This remainder of 3 marks is applied equally to each of the intervals between boundaries: A-B, B-C and C-D.

Therefore, the grade B boundary is 11 marks lower than the grade A boundary, i.e. the **Grade B** boundary is **74 marks**.

In this scenario, for grade B, the sum of the individual notional paper boundary marks (139) is not equal to the corresponding core exam grade boundary (140).

What about the A*?

The A* boundary for the Core Exam is set the same number of marks above the A boundary as there is between the A boundary and B boundary, or halfway between the A boundary mark and the maximum mark, whichever is lower1. In this example both give a 20 mark interval. Where the halfway point between the A boundary mark is not a whole number, this is rounded down to the mark below.

The A* notional boundaries for the papers are set so that they are in the same relative position as the Core Exam grade A* boundary. Where the relative position is not a whole mark, the notional boundary is rounded down to the mark below.

In the example above, the A* grade boundary for the core exam (i.e. 180) is halfway between the A (i.e. 160) grade boundary and the max marks (i.e. 200). Therefore, Paper 1 A* notional boundary is calculated as 87 marks and paper 2 A* notional boundary is calculated as 92 marks, which are also halfway between the A notional grade boundary and max marks for each paper (rounded down).

[1] On occasions there may be technical and statistical evidence that suggests that the Core Exam A* boundary should be set at a different mark, in these instances the arithmetic calculation would not apply

Again, for the A* grade in this scenario, the sum of the individual notional paper boundary marks (179) is not equal to the corresponding core exam grade boundary (180).

Document information

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Change History Record

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