SETTING AND MAINTAINING STANDARDS AND GRADE DECISION RULES

Policy Status: Assessment Standards and Regulatory Assurance Policy
Applies to: All I-PATH qualifications, examinations and awards (regulated and unregulated)
Audience: Head Office, Examiners, Artistic Directors, Artistic Committees, Teacher Members
Policy Owner: Head Office
Governance Oversight: Examinations & Standards Committee (ESC) and Grand Council
Review Cycle: Annual and following significant assessment or standards-related events
Last Reviewed: 15th February 2026

1. Purpose of the Policy

This policy sets out how I-PATH:

- establishes clear grade decision rules
- maintains consistent standards over time
- ensures that grades reflect defined levels of attainment
- protects learners from unfair advantage or disadvantage
- supports awarding-organisation and regulatory confidence

Maintaining standards is fundamental to the credibility, comparability and integrity of I-PATH qualifications and awards.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- graded examinations
- vocational graded examinations
- achievement awards and graded achievement awards
- guided graded examinations
- practical, written and recorded assessment components

It applies across:

- face-to-face exams
- live video exams
- recorded video exams

And across regulated and unregulated provision.

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3. Core Principles

I-PATH's approach to standards and grade decisions is underpinned by the following principles:

- **Fitness for purpose** - grades reflect the intended demand of the qualification
- **Consistency over time** - standards are stable year-on-year
- **Transparency** - grade decision rules are clear and documented
- **Evidence-based judgement** - decisions are supported by data and professional judgement
- **Learner protection** - learners are not disadvantaged by change or inconsistency
- **Separation of roles** - marking, standardisation and oversight are clearly distinguished

4. Grade Structures and Levels of Attainment

4.1 Graded Outcomes

Depending on the qualification or award, outcomes may include:

- Pass / Merit / Distinction
- Achievement levels
- Grade bands aligned to published criteria

Each grade represents a specified level of attainment, defined in the relevant syllabus and assessment criteria.

4.2 Alignment to Levels

Where applicable, grades align to:

- Entry Levels
- Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) Levels 1-4 (and above where specified)

Level alignment reflects:

- technical demand
- cognitive demand
- autonomy and artistic interpretation
- consistency and quality of performance

5. Setting Grade Decision Rules

5.1 Initial Setting of Standards

Grade decision rules are established during qualification development and approval, informed by:

- published learning outcomes and assessment criteria
- professional judgement of subject experts

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- intended level of demand and progression
- alignment with comparable qualifications across the sector
- awarding-organisation guidance (for regulated provision)

Grade boundaries and criteria are documented and approved through governance processes.

5.2 Grade Decision Rules in Practice

Examiners are required to:

- apply published criteria consistently
- judge performance holistically against descriptors
- differentiate accurately between grades
- evidence decisions through written feedback

Numerical marks, where used, are mapped transparently to grade outcomes.

6. Maintaining Standards Over Time

6.1 Standardisation

I-PATH maintains standards through:

- annual examiner standardisation exercises
- use of real (appropriately anonymised) assessment examples
- analysis of examiner marking patterns and standard deviation
- mandatory participation in standardisation meetings

Where variation is identified, additional training and re-standardisation are required.

6.2 Comparability

To ensure standards remain aligned across the sector:

- I-PATH participates in annual comparability activity with the awarding organisation
- the awarding organisation represents I-PATH in sector-wide comparability exercises
- outcomes are reviewed to confirm alignment of demand and grading standards

6.3 Monitoring Outcomes

Head Office monitors:

- grade distributions
- centre-level patterns
- year-on-year trends
- examiner consistency

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Unexpected variation is investigated proportionately.

7. Moderation and Intervention

Where evidence suggests that standards may not have been applied consistently:

- moderation may be approved by the ESC
- further sampling or review may be undertaken
- awarding organisation support may be sought where appropriate

Moderation outcomes are documented and auditable.

8. Managing Change to Standards

8.1 Principle of Stability

Standards are not adjusted casually or retrospectively.

Any proposed change must:

- be evidence-based
- protect learners already entered
- be approved through governance channels

8.2 Implementing Change

Where change is required:

- changes are clearly documented
- centres are given appropriate notice
- transitional arrangements are implemented
- learners are not disadvantaged

Significant change may trigger:

- qualification review
- restriction or withdrawal processes

9. Escalation of Standards Risks

Concerns relating to standards or grade decisions are escalated under the:

- Adverse Effects, Incident Reporting and Regulatory Escalation Policy

Where standards risk could affect regulated provision:

- the awarding organisation is engaged promptly

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- internal action does not compromise external processes

10. Records and Audit

I-PATH retains records of:

- grade decision rules
- standardisation outcomes
- comparability evidence
- moderation decisions
- governance approvals

Records are:

- factual
- securely stored
- auditable

11. Roles and Responsibilities

Examiners

Apply grade decision rules consistently and transparently.

Artistic Directors and Committees

Advise on subject-specific standards and progression.

Head Office

Monitors data, coordinates QA and escalates concerns.

Examinations & Standards Committee

Provides challenge, approval and oversight.

Grand Council

Provides strategic assurance and approves major changes.

12. Relationship to Other Policies

This policy must be read alongside:

- Assessment Policy

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- Quality Assurance Policy
- Marking, Results and Results Release Policy
- Adverse Effects and Incident Reporting Policy
- Qualification Review and Withdrawal Policy

13. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed:

- annually
- following significant standards-related issues
- following regulatory or sector change

Final Statement

Clear grade decision rules and consistent standards protect learners and uphold trust.

This policy ensures that I-PATH qualifications and awards maintain credibility, comparability and integrity, year after year, in line with best practice and regulatory expectations.

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