Setting the standard

SQE1: Modified Angoff method

We use a method called the Modified Angoff method[1] as one of the principal methods to set the cut score. See below on how the cut score is translated into the pass mark.
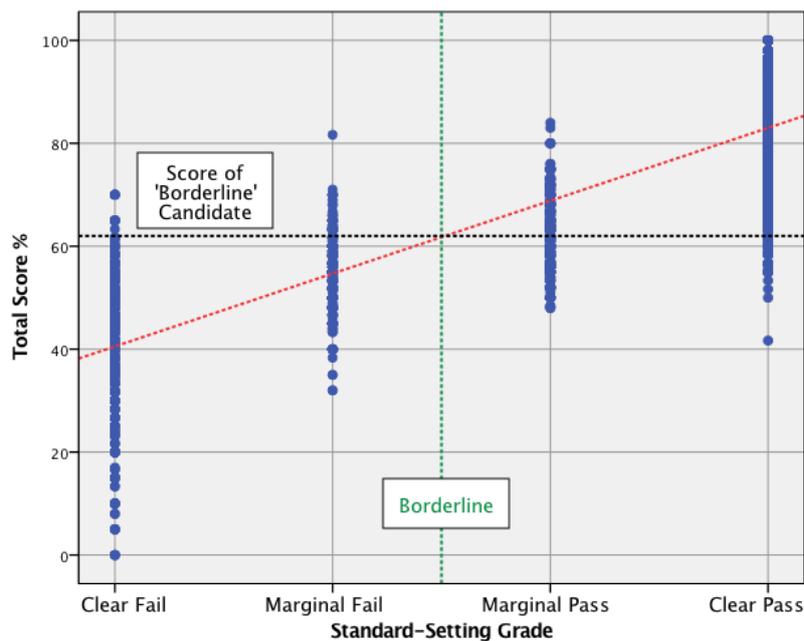
According to the Modified Angoff method the cut score is determined by a panel of solicitors who consider each question on the MCT paper to decide how many out of 10 just competent solicitors would answer the question correctly. The standard of competency applied is the Threshold Standard. Prior to the panel's consideration of each question, there will be training for panel members, and a discussion of application of the Threshold Standard.

The judgements made by the panel members are averaged to reach the cut score for each item and summated for the paper. The Modified Angoff method is frequently supplemented by other methods and in particular Linear Equating to ensure a consistent standard across different deliveries.

SQE2: Borderline regression method

Borderline regression is a widely used method in Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCEs) and considered to be one of the most objective ways to standard set a practical examination. We will use this method to determine the cut-score for SQE2.

In this method, each station is marked by an appropriately trained examiner, who provides a mark for each of the criteria against which performance in that station is judged. Each examiner also provides an overall "standard setting" grade of pass, marginal pass, marginal fail or fail. This standard setting grade does not count as part of the candidate's mark but is used to set the cut score. Candidate sores are regressed against standard setting grades to arrive at a cut sore for each station, and – summated – for the assessment.

[1] For details and variations see chapter 6 in: Cizek GJ, Bunch MB (2007) Standard Setting: a guide to establishing and evaluating performance standards on tests. London: Sage 352pp,They note (p 82) "the lack of clarity in labelling" the various modifications.

From cut-score to pass mark

While the Modified Angoff method can be used to set the cut score for objective testing (eg MCQs) and Borderline Regression for legal skills stations, both take no account of mark precision measured by the standard error of measurement (SEm).

In high stakes professional exams the interests of the consumer are normally considered paramount. It is the SRA's responsibility to make sure that those that pass deserve to pass and the public are protected and so precision must be taken into account in setting the pass mark. For this reason, the final pass mark will involve a correction to the cut score made for measurement error following standard psychometric procedures.