

## Assessing level 1 and 2 Visual Arts for external assessment: The relationships between Cusps and Bands

### Bands: Low, Mid and High

It is accepted knowledge that each grade of achievement in NCEA is a ‘band’ which encompasses a range of performance within the defined achievement criteria.

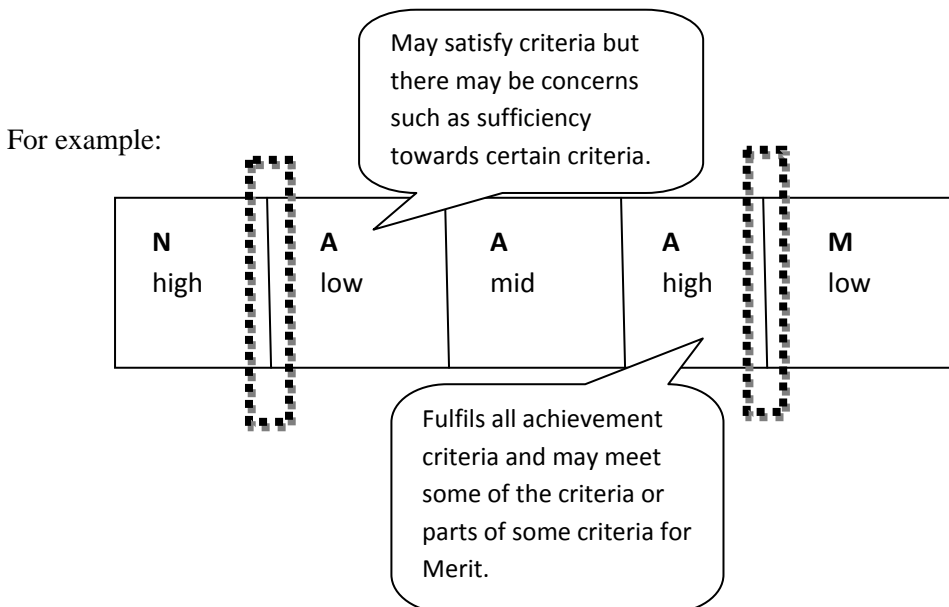
It is common practice for teachers to recognise and record the proximity to each grade boundary (low, mid, and high) within this ‘band’ of achievement when assessing work in their own schools for two main reasons:

- to assist with the refinement of future assessment decisions when candidates meet the required criteria at varying levels within a grade
- to assist with any required adjustments of grades after verification.

Commonly, this ‘banding’ within a grade is referred to by teachers as ‘thirds’; however, this is a misnomer, for within standards-based assessment it is quite possible to have varying proportions of low, mid and highs within each grade depending on the cohort. For example, in any given year, it is possible to have large numbers of students at the upper end of Achieved with only one or two close to the Not Achieved boundary.

### Cusp Portfolios

Sometimes, portfolios at either end of a grade range may sit exceedingly close to a boundary – that is, they may have already begun to meet some of the criteria at the next grade level, or conversely may have limited evidence for some of the required criteria. These are referred to as ‘cusp’ portfolios and are a distinct group within the broad bandings of low, mid, and high.



In the case of the Achieved/Merit cusp portfolio, it may satisfy some of the criteria for Merit but be missing vital evidence to actually relocate it into the Merit grade range. Conversely, a Merit-low ‘cusp’ portfolio may satisfy all of the criteria for Merit but only just. It may verge on insufficiency in some criteria.

## **Verification using Cusps**

Schools send in portfolios that are clearly within each grade ('mid' portfolios); but good practice also means that when more challenging portfolios appear at the grade boundaries, verification will be sought by schools on these 'cusp' portfolios. This practice refines understandings of grade boundaries for assessment purposes. As a result of this, both 'mid' grade portfolios and range of 'cusp' portfolios are carefully identified during benchmarking to use for verification purposes.

Importantly, when a teacher indicates that a sample is low or high, they are not necessarily indicating that a sample is a 'cusp' but simply that it sits at the top or bottom of the grade range, which may or may not be representative of a 'third'.

## **Adjusting provisional grades using Bands**

If grades are returned and changes have been made across grade boundaries (e.g. N-high to A -low), this does not automatically mean that teachers should change all of the portfolios that they put into the same 'band'. Some changes will need to be made, however, and each band should be reassessed in light of the provisional grade changes. In the case of the example above, it would be prudent to re-examine all of the N-high and A-low samples at the school and adjust the grades of other candidates whose work is similar to the one verified.