

Understanding grade boundaries 2026

International qualifications



Qualifications continue to be in-line with established standards, which means that students who get a certain grade have shown a similar level of performance to students awarded the same grade in previous years. Maintaining these standards over time ensures fairness for all and confidence in what grades mean.



Why do grade boundaries move?

The difficulty of a paper may change from year to year. Sometimes, this is just because questions proved to be a bit easier, or a bit harder, than those seen the year before. Changes might also be a result of our desire to produce fairer assessments, for example if we have removed unintended barriers in the assessment to make it more accessible.

Such improvements are aimed at enabling students to access questions appropriately, enhance their experience, and build confidence. Boundaries move to allow for differences in the difficulty of the test.



How are boundaries set?

We use a mix of statistical evidence and expert judgement. This year, like every year, students can have confidence that the grade they receive fairly reflects their knowledge of the subject, and maintains the standard from previous years, so that grades mean the same thing regardless of when an exam was taken.

The process starts with data, we use these to help identify a range of marks where the grade boundary might be, based on evidence such as how the paper performed in comparison to last year and what we know about the students taking the paper.

Senior examiners then review the quality of student work over a range of marks and recommend grade boundaries based on all the available evidence. Boundaries are approved by Pearson staff to ensure consistency both across years, and that we've applied the principles fairly across subjects.

Uniform Mark Scale (UMS)

In modular qualifications, students take exams at different points in the course, and we want to ensure students with the same level of performance are treated fairly, even if the exams they took were of slightly different difficulty. To achieve this, marks are converted to a scaled score. Raw mark grade boundaries change for each exam session, but UMS grade boundaries are fixed and are always the same.



Helpful links

- [Convert UMS and raw marks](#)
- [Pearson Grade Boundaries](#)