

GCSE Grade-Boundary Shift Report (2022–2026)

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Executive Summary

Across the comparable single-grade qualifications, grade 4 and grade 7 boundaries generally finished higher in 2026 than in 2022. The strongest sustained increases occur in OCR science and OCR Mathematics; AQA rises more steadily, while Pearson is flatter where a complete five-year series is available. This should be read as movement in the marks required for a grade, not as evidence that standards have formally changed: paper difficulty, cohort performance, specification routes, and maximum marks all affect annual boundaries.

The analysis uses final qualification rows only: AQA/Pearson subject boundaries and OCR Overall boundaries. Component rows are excluded from the trend calculations.

Five-Year Movement (2022 → 2026)

Values are raw boundary marks; + indicates an increase. Foundation qualifications do not award grade 7, so that column is not applicable.

Board / qualification	Grade 4 shift	Grade 7 shift	Comment
AQA English Language	70 → 75 (+5)	100 → 103 (+3)	Stable upward drift
AQA English Literature	2022 options: 48–50/130 → 66/160	2022 options: 86–88/130 → 113/160	Maximum mark and routes changed; compare percentages
AQA Mathematics Foundation	135 → 154 (+19)	—	Large recovery after 2022
AQA Mathematics Higher	51 → 63 (+12)	156 → 166 (+10)	Consistent rise
AQA Biology F / H	109 → 127 (+18) / 51 → 52 (+1)	— / 104 → 107 (+3)	Foundation rise; Higher broadly stable
AQA Chemistry F / H	104 → 110 (+6) / 36 → 43 (+7)	— / 103 → 120 (+17)	Higher grade 7 rises strongly
AQA Physics F / H	115 → 126 (+11) / 56 → 67 (+11)	— / 119 → 128 (+9)	Moderate upward movement
AQA Computer Science	59 → 72 (+13)	113 → 136 (+23)	Same boundaries across language options
AQA Business Studies	64 → 77 (+13)	106 → 115 (+9)	Moderate upward shift
AQA Economics	75 → 82 (+7)	115 → 120 (+5)	Relatively stable upward drift
OCR English Language	67 → 75 (+8)	102 → 110 (+8)	Gradual increase
OCR English Literature	39 → 47 (+8)	78 → 104 (+26)	Large grade 7 movement
OCR Mathematics F / H	119 → 133 (+14) / 45 → 57 (+12)	— / 158 → 170 (+12)	Upward, with 2023–24 variation
OCR Computer Science	60 → 77 (+17)	106 → 124 (+18)	Strong upward movement
OCR Business Studies	55 → 70 (+15)	90 → 108 (+18)	Clear upward shift, especially grade 7
OCR Economics	51 → 66 (+15)	91 → 104 (+13)	Clear upward shift
OCR	Most routes rise; Chemistry A H grade 7:	Often +15 to +36	Largest and most volatile

Board / qualification	Grade 4 shift	Grade 7 shift	Comment
Biology/Chemistry/Physics	+36		shifts
Pearson Mathematics Foundation / Higher	135 → 151 (+16) / 38 → 50 (+12)	— / 137 → 146 (+9)	Clear recovery after 2024
Pearson English Language (1EN0)	77 → 87 (+10)	108 → 115 (+7)	Gradual upward movement
Pearson English Literature (1ET0)	51/120 → 75/160	83/120 → 116/160	Maximum mark changed; compare percentages, not raw marks
Pearson Computer Science	45 → 46 (+1)	92 → 88 (–4)	Essentially flat/slightly lower
Pearson Business Studies	2023: 82 → 2026: 81	2023: 122 → 2026: 125	No 2022 source row; broadly flat

Pearson English Language (1EN0) is now included as a complete 2022–2026 series. Pearson English Language 2.0 (1EN2) begins in 2023, so it is treated as a separate specification. Pearson English Literature changed from 120 to 160 maximum marks after 2022; its trend must therefore be evaluated by percentage of total marks.

Business Studies is available for AQA and OCR across the full 2022–2026 period. Pearson Business Studies begins in the available cache in 2023. No Pearson Economics qualification appears in the supplied source PDFs, so no Pearson Economics trend is inferred.

Percentage-Point Perspective

Normalising by each qualification's maximum mark gives a fairer comparison. Across non-Combined-Science series with complete data, the median 2022–2026 movement was approximately:

- AQA: +5.5 percentage points at grade 4 and +6.5 points at grade 7.
- OCR: +8.9 points at grade 4 and +9.4 points at grade 7, but with the widest spread.
- Pearson: approximately +5 points at grade 4 and close to flat at grade 7 across the available complete series.

2027 Outlook

The baseline forecast is a cautious continuation of each series' average annual change from 2022–2026. On that basis, most AQA and OCR grade 4 and grade 7 boundaries are likely to edge upward in 2027, typically by 1–5 raw marks. OCR science should be treated as a wide-range forecast because its historical shifts are much more volatile. Pearson Mathematics is likely to remain near its 2026 level or rise modestly; Pearson Computer Science is more likely to remain flat than to continue rising.

For AQA English Literature specifically, the post-2022 160-mark series rose from 57 to 66 at grade 4 and from 104 to 113 at grade 7. A continuation of that recent pace would place 2027 boundaries near 69 (grade 4) and 116 (grade 7), subject to route and paper difficulty.

These are statistical baselines, not official predictions. A substantially easier paper could lower a boundary, while a harder paper could raise it. Combined Science is excluded from single-grade trend claims: its thresholds represent paired outcomes (for example 99 = 9-9 and 54 = 5-4) and must be analysed using the board's explicit double-grade labels.