

Guide on grade point average (GPA) for higher education providers

This guide on GPA is for higher education providers, and is relevant to senior managers, academic staff, educational developers, and those working in registry and quality.

About GPA

GPA is a measure of achievement, which can be used to indicate progress during a student's degree studies (cumulative) and/or as the final measure of achievement at the end of a degree (summative).

Grade points are assigned to individual modules (or courses) using a GPA scale. A GPA score is then calculated using the grade points from the modules that contribute to the final award (either at particular stages during a degree and/or at the end of a degree programme).

Why is GPA being introduced in UK higher education?

A national initiative has investigated and recommended the use of GPA to enhance the reporting of student achievement in UK higher education.

Although tools, such as the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR), CVs or e-portfolios are vital in capturing the variety of attributes, skills and experiences students gain in higher education, it is well-recognised that it is useful to have a straightforward summative measure of student achievement.

The UK honours degree is an established and highly-valued qualification, but it has been shown that there are limitations in the honours degree classification system. In particular, the broad categories or degree classes do not sufficiently differentiate between student performance.

In terms of effectively distinguishing student achievement, there are issues related to students gaining a 2i or 2ii degree class. For example, there is a difference between a student gaining 60% ('low 2i') and a student who gains 67% ('high 2i') on their programme, yet they may both be awarded a 2i degree.

There is the perception in higher education that a 'cliff edge' has been created between the 2i and 2ii classification. This is because a 2i is often required for entry to postgraduate study and employers may look for this degree class or higher in recruiting graduates. There are, of course, no hard and fast

rules here, as there are a range of types of employers with a variety of recruitment and selection processes.

Benefits of GPA

The national initiative has highlighted key benefits of GPA:

Increased granularity – rather than the four categories of a degree class (First, 2i, 2ii, Third), a GPA score can provide a finer level of detail for student achievement (e.g. an individual score of 3.75).

International recognition – with GPA being used and understood in a wide range of countries, particularly in North America, UK graduates will be well placed to compete in an increasingly global market place.

A GPA scale for UK higher education

The national GPA initiative worked with universities and colleges to develop a commonly-agreed GPA scale, which is similar to the globally recognised North American GPA scale. The important outcome from the initiative is the recommendation that the following GPA scale be adopted by all higher education providers in the UK.

The GPA scale for UK higher education		
Grade	Percentage mark	Grade point
A+	≥75	4.25
A	71-74	4.0
A-	67-70	3.75
B+	64-66	3.50
B	61-63	3.25
B-	57-60	3.0
C+	54-56	2.75
C	50-53	2.50
C-	48-49	2.25
D+	43-47	2.0
D	40-42	1.50
D-	38-39	1.0
F+	35-37	0.75
F	30-34	0.50
F-	≤29	0.0

Higher education providers can use this scale to determine grade points for modules and therefore GPA scores for their students. The scale has been designed so that no student groups are disadvantaged.

What does this mean for higher education providers?

Clearly, changes to recording and representing student achievement requires time for institutional planning, so that consultation with staff and students can take place on how GPA will be introduced as part of a process that is suited to the institutional context. This process will need to involve deciding on how GPA is used in a way that is appropriate to institutional mission, subject mix and student body. This will include, for example, determining which module or course assessments will contribute to the final award.

'Dual running' of GPA and the honours degree classification system

The national GPA initiative recommended that a period of 'dual running' be introduced in the short to medium term. This is where higher education providers can use both the current honours degree classification and GPA as measures of student achievement. During this 'dual running' period, a university or college may decide and plan to use GPA, replacing the honours degree classification system.

A period of 'dual running' would be valuable because at a national level:

- There can be further communication and consultation on GPA adoption with students, staff groups, organisations and agencies across and beyond higher education (e.g. employers, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies).
- More evidence can be gathered to fully evaluate the use of GPA as a measure of achievement.

Within five years, there will be a national review of the adoption of GPA for UK higher education.

Assessment regulations, policy and practice

Degree awarding bodies have the autonomy to determine their assessment and award

regulations and this will apply equally to the use of GPA. Institutional considerations that may impact on how GPA scores are calculated include, for example, weighting of modules from different programme levels; compensation and condonement; re-assessed module grades; extenuating circumstances; and transfer of credit and treatment of 'year abroad' credit.

In introducing GPA, there may also be opportunities for higher education providers to enhance assessment policy and practice (e.g. academic marking practices).

How does GPA fit with the use of HEAR?

The HEAR is now issued by many higher education providers and can accommodate the use of GPA as a summative measure. The record also provides a detailed breakdown of a student's programme, along with the extra-curricular activities they engaged with and that are recognised by their institution.

Further information

www.heacademy.ac.uk/gpa – provides information on the GPA UK-wide initiative and the final report, with recommendations, on the GPA pilot project 2013-14.

www.hear.ac.uk – offers information, advice and guidance on the implementation of the HEAR in UK higher education.