

Guide on grade point average (GPA) for employers

The honours degree classification system in the UK has been the subject of much debate over recent years. A national initiative has therefore explored the introduction of a GPA system in the UK. Employers' views informed the work of this initiative. This guide is for a range of employers and employer groups, outlining the background to the proposed GPA system and plans for its introduction.

What is 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?

It is well-recognised that the UK honours degree is an established and highly-valued qualification, but the broad degree categories or 'classes' of the honours degree classification system (i.e. First, 2i, 2ii, Third) do not sufficiently differentiate student performance. For example, there is a difference in achievement between a student who gains a 'low 2i' (e.g. 60%) and a student who gains a 'high 2i' (e.g. 67%) yet they are likely to both be awarded a 2i degree. Similarly, a student may have gained a 2ii degree that was in fact near a 2i class, but this is unlikely to be readily apparent to others.

A national initiative has explored the use of GPA in UK higher education. By working with a representative group of higher education providers, the initiative has looked at how GPA might be used to enhance the reporting of student achievement in the UK. This initiative has highlighted how GPA offers particular benefits:

- Increased clarity in relation to student achievement and performance – a specific grade is determined for each student (e.g. 3.75) rather than a degree class.
- International recognition – GPA is a system that is widely used and understood, an important consideration in ensuring that UK graduates are best placed in an increasingly global marketplace.

The national initiative on GPA worked with universities and colleges to develop and propose a commonly-agreed GPA scale, which is similar to the globally recognised North American GPA scale.

A GPA scale for UK higher education

A key recommendation from the national initiative is the adoption of the following common GPA scale by all higher education providers.

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.

Higher education providers will be responsible for determining how this GPA scale is introduced and applied with regard to their mission, subject mix and student body.

How will GPA be introduced?

The national GPA initiative recommended that a period of what is termed 'dual running' be introduced in the short to medium term. This is where higher education providers 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.

This period of 'dual running' would be valuable because it would mean that:

- There can be more wide-ranging communication and consultation on GPA adoption with employers, staff groups in higher education, students, and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.
- Employers and organisations that use degree classification results as measures of individual performance would have time to make changes and develop benchmarks.

- Further 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.

How will GPA results be reported and issued?

As GPA can be used as a cumulative measure to indicate a student's learning and progress during their degree, this information could be helpful to employers that use pre-graduation recruitment strategies and activities.

As with a degree classification, the final GPA score (summative) can be included on formal student records, such as a degree transcript or Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR).

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.