

Grade Point Average

A note by Doug Hunt – Deputy President (Education)

Background

Grade Point Average (GPA) is a grading system mainly used in the USA, where a given number represents the average of a student's grades during their time at an institution and is usually weighted by the number of credits given for their enrolled course. Most American universities use a four-point system, where the maximum grade point is 4.0.

A group of Russell Group universities (Birmingham, Nottingham, LSE, Sheffield, Warwick, UCL, York and Bristol) considered alternatives to the existing degree classification system. The group determined its preferences for introducing a form of the Grade Point Average (GPA) system.¹

After the group contacted other universities, the initial group expanded to the universities shown below by September 2012:

- Birmingham
- Bristol
- King's College London
- Leeds
- LSE (they are now against GPA)
- Manchester
- Nottingham
- Oxford Brookes
- Sheffield
- Southampton
- Warwick
- UCL
- York

Their proposed GPA system is shown in appendix 1.

Arguments for the GPA scheme

- In your final year a student will work harder, regardless if they are near a borderline, which provides an incentive to students to maximise their performance
- More transparent and more able to reflect different levels of attainment, so a graduate company/potential supervisor will know straight away if you just missed out on a 2.1 or a 1st
- It is an internationally understood grading system

Arguments against the GPA scheme

- The emphasis on a student trying to improve their grade, may lead to grade inflation and more students will pick the "easier" elective modules. This takes place in the USA and because of this LSE now don't want to use the GPA system.
- The American higher education (HE) system is not the same as the British, so should we use the same grading system? If we do, we still need to convert British GPA to US GPA, since our HE system is very different.

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- The proposed GPA scheme goes up to 4.25 (not 4.0) and different GPAs correspond to different percentages for different subjects. Some students may find this more confusing than the current grading system we have.
- The GPA grading system doesn't align itself with the one for A-levels, which is letter grade and percentages.
- Graduate companies can already ask for transcripts and do at assessment centres, if they wish to know your exact grades.
- Graduate companies may start asking for more than 3.00 (equiv. to 60% - a 2.1) to get less students applying and having to pay less for their human resources department.
- Students may experience more stress if they are worrying over every mark and may make the student body more competitive.
- Changing from our current grading system to GPA will require a considerable amount of work and College resources. These resources could be far better spent in improving the student experience.

Suggested Beliefs

1. Imperial College London should keep the traditional British degree class marking system.
2. The student body opposes the introduction of a GPA marking system.
3. Switching to a GPA marking system would be a misuse of College resources.

Suggested Resolves

1. To inform the College that the student body opposes a GPA marking system.
2. To inform the Russell Group that Imperial College Union does not favour a GPA marking system.

References

1. Introducing a Grade Point Average System to the UK Working paper: A review of the proposals and evidence, September 2012

Appendix 1 – Proposed UK GPA scale¹

Grade	Standard	Grade Point	UK current descriptor	Possible % equivalence in qualitative subjects	Possible % equivalence in quantitative subjects
A+	Excellent	4.25	Top 1st	75+	85+
A	Excellent	4.00	Good 1st	72-74	78-85
A-	Excellent	3.75	Low 1st	70-71	70-77
B+	Good	3.50	High 2-1	66-69	66-69
B	Good	3.25	Mid 2-1	63-65	63-65
B-	Good/Satisfactory	3.00	Low 2-1	60-62	60-62
C+	Satisfactory	2.75	High 2-2	56-59	56-59
C	Satisfactory	2.50	Mid 2-2	53-55	53-55
C-	Satisfactory	2.25	Low 2-2	50-52	50-52
D+	Adequate	2.00	3 rd	43-49	43-49
D	Pass	1.00	Low 3 rd or pass	40-42	40-42
D-	Marginal Fail	0.50 for qual; 0.75 for quant	Marginal Fail	35-39	35-39
F	Fail	0.00 for qual; 0.5 for quant	Fail	>35	25-34
F-	Low Fail (quant. only)	0.00	Fail	NA	0-24