

**University of Aberdeen
Academic Quality Handbook**

**CODE OF PRACTICE ON ASSESSMENT:
FOR POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT STUDENTS WHO COMMENCED THEIR STUDIES IN 2020/21
(AND WERE UNDERTAKING THEIR STUDIES ON 18 MARCH 2021)**

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All, or specific sections, of this Code of Practice on Assessment may not apply to healthcare programmes (i.e. Physicians' Associate and Non-medical Prescribing Qualification). The School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition can further advise on Assessment regulations for these cohorts of students.

All Candidates should also consult course and programme handbooks, which will provide assessment information specific to the courses and programme they are undertaking.

Section 1: Introduction

- 1.1 Assessment is the central element of the process by which the University is able to make awards to candidates who have completed courses and programmes. The purpose of this Code of Practice on Assessment is to ensure that the processes of assessment are conducted in a **fair, consistent** and **transparent** manner across the University. This common approach is especially important due to the inter-disciplinary nature of many of the University's programmes which means that candidates are studying courses offered by a number of Schools and these courses are then combined together in determining the overall award.
- 1.2 This Code of Practice on Assessment applies to Postgraduate Taught (PGT) students who commenced their studies during the 2020/21 academic year and were **undertaking their studies on 18 March 2021**.

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

- 1.3 The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework¹ has developed a set of [SCQF Levels Descriptors](#) which illustrate the generic expectations for each **level** of study. Level of study refers to the level of the course, not necessarily programme year. For example, a Level 3 course will have been designed to fit to the SCQF descriptors for level 3 and that does not change, regardless of whether that course is taken in programme year 3 (PY3) or in programme year 4 (PY4). These descriptors, which set out the general characteristic outcomes, are important in terms of providing a reference point of expectations for each level of study.
- 1.4 The University's awards must comply with the SCQF framework. In broad terms, candidates must therefore achieve the minimum number of credit points to be eligible to receive their award. These requirements are detailed in [Minimum Credit Requirements for Awards](#).
- 1.5 The [University Calendar](#) entry will state the requirements for each programme and award. This should include:
 - (a) The required courses for the programme, including courses that do not carry any credit weighting (i.e. zero²credit-rated courses),
 - (b) The details of the **compulsory** requirements. These are courses that must be passed for the achievement of the award. Such compulsory requirements may be set by the requirements of a Professional, Regulatory or Statutory Body (PSRB) which accredits the award or may be set by the Examiners (e.g. a requirement that a candidate achieve a pass in the thesis/ project).
 - (c) The number of remaining credits required for achievement of the programme award.
- 1.6 The **criteria** for courses and their relative weightings which will contribute to the determination of the overall programme award, must be made explicit to all candidates at the outset of their programme. In the case of postgraduate taught programmes, the constitution of each Stage of the programme (NB: a stage may consist of taught courses or a research dissertation/project or a combination of both taught and research, which typically will cover learning outcomes associated with at least 60 credit points at Level 5 (SCQF Level 11).
- 1.7 This information should be provided in a single document to ensure transparency and ease of reference regardless of whether the degree programme is delivered by a single discipline or is a degree programme delivered by more than one discipline.

¹ The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework is a common national framework for all awards in Scotland. It makes clear the relationship between qualifications, levels, entry and exit points, and routes for progression between awards. Further information is available at www.scqf.org.uk

² In the case of zero credit rated courses the relative weighting of this towards the overall determination of the award must be clearly stated to (i) students and (ii) Registry (via academicsservices@abdn.ac.uk); the latter is to ensure the Student Record Systems' Degree Classification screens and algorithms are accurate.

Section 2: Marking

Common Grading Scale (CGS)

- 2.1 The [University of Aberdeen Common Grading Scale \(CGS\)](#) provides a common marking scale which is used across the University. This enables candidates to compare their performance in different disciplines and courses and ensures consistency in assessment.
- 2.2 The CGS is an alphanumeric scale comprising 23 discrete **Grades** grouped into seven **Bands** with an associated **Grade Point** for each grade. These Grade Points are used for the purposes of (i) determining the overall course mark from a number of components (e.g. end of course exam and essay mark) and (ii) determining overall honours degree classification or progression and award within a taught postgraduate award. Each band has two associated **Descriptors** (one for essay-based courses and one for more numerical-based courses). These descriptors should be appropriate for most assessments. There will be some forms of assessment (e.g. practical exams) where it may be necessary for these to be tailored to meet the specific learning outcomes of the assessment.
- 2.3 It is University policy that an overall grade for each course must be awarded. As well as releasing the alphanumeric CGS for the course, the associated overall course grade point (to two decimal places) will also be given to students. If grading is carried out in percentages, or in another scale, these must first be converted to the CGS prior to release to students. If a School or Discipline wishes to use a grading scale other than the CGS, this must be mapped to the CGS and approval given by the University Committee on Teaching & Learning (UCTL) via the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC).
- 2.4 Band descriptors should be read in conjunction with the [SCQF Levels Descriptors](#) which detail the expected level of attainment at each level of study.
- 2.5 The Band Descriptors should be used to inform the judgement as to which grade should be awarded for a piece of assessment. In doing so, it is important that this is done in the context that the top band represents the best that a candidate at that level could be expected to achieve. Students should be made aware of the band descriptors for *each* assessment. It should be noted that this means a grade obtained at one level is not equivalent to the same grade awarded at a different level.
- 2.6 Normally in awarding a grade, Examiners should use the band descriptor to determine which band is appropriate and should then select the middle grade within that band (i.e. Grade B2 from within the Band B1, B2 and B3). Adjustment upwards or downwards to a higher or lower grade (i.e. B1 or B3) within that band can then be determined, if appropriate, based on how well the candidate's performance meets the band descriptor. Where an assessment is more quantitative in nature, it may be possible to map directly onto the grade.
- 2.7 A Grade should be awarded for each component of assessment (i.e. each essay or examination question). These component marks can then be aggregated to determine the final overall grade for the course. In some cases, it may not be considered appropriate to award a Grade directly (for example in a multiple-choice test or quantitative type test). In these cases, taking account of the band descriptors, Schools should determine the appropriate percentage (or other) scale that would be used to convert the mark to a grade on the Common Grading Scale. This information should be approved by the QAC, made readily available to all students and such conversions should be published in course handbooks and made available to all Examiners.

Determination of Overall Course Grade

- 2.8 Most courses involve more than one component of assessment. Course grades are calculated from a weighted average of all contributing assessments. Candidates must be made aware of the relative weightings of each component at the outset of the course.
- 2.9 Each Grade on the Common Grading Scale is associated with a numerical **Grade Point** (0-22). These Grade Points are used for the purposes of determining overall course Grades.

In academic year 2020/21 and beyond: Course grades are calculated from a weighted average of all contributing assessments. From this weighted average (to two decimal places) the overall alphanumeric Grade for the course should be determined.

For example: A course has two essays each weighted 20% and one exam weighted 60%, the Grades for which are B2, A3 and C1 respectively. The overall Grade for the course would be determined as follows:

Grade	Grade Point	Weighting	Calculation
B2	16	20%	$(20\% \times 16) + (20\% \times 20) + (60\% \times 14)$ $= 3.2 + 4 + 8.4$ $= 15.60$ $= B3$
A3	20	20%	
C1	14	60%	

Internal Examiners/Markers

- 2.10 University Court Ordinance 404 and the [General Regulations for First Degrees](#) and for [Taught Postgraduate Awards](#) indicate that the Examiners for each degree shall be the “Professors, Readers and Lecturers in the University [including those holding such status on an honorary basis] whose courses qualify for that degree, and such External Examiners as may be appointed by the University Court”. Notwithstanding these Regulations, the Senate has agreed that Heads of School may also permit others without that status, such as Teaching Assistants, Teaching Fellows, Clinical Tutors or Recognised Teachers, (including those appointed as Relief Teachers and/or on a part-time basis) to mark prescribed degree assessments (in-course assignments and/or written examination scripts) where the Head of School is satisfied that the person concerned is sufficiently experienced to be a competent marker.

“Blind” / Anonymous Marking

- 2.11 Written Examination Scripts³: All written examination scripts must be **anonymous**, i.e. students should only be identified by candidate number. The University’s examination booklets require candidates to write their student ID number on their scripts with their name being concealed in a sealable section.
- 2.12 Other Summative Assessments: Where appropriate, all other assessments should be marked anonymously. In determining the appropriateness of anonymous marking, the impact of this on the quality of the feedback subsequently available to students should be considered.

Moderation Procedures

- 2.13 The [University’s Moderation Policy](#) is a process intended to assure that an assessment outcome is fair and reliable and that assessment criteria have been applied consistently. The [Quality Assurance Agency \(QAA\) UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) stipulates that ‘Policies and processes for marking assessments and for moderating marks are clearly articulated, consistently operated and regularly reviewed’. Moderation must be carried out prior to the return of grades to students.

Return of Grades

- 2.14 Markers should provide timely feedback to students on all types of in-course assessment, including oral or clinical examinations, even when the grades are summative and contribute to the overall course grade.
- 2.15 The Senate has agreed that Schools must inform students of their CGS grade for individual elements of in-course assignments irrespective of whether the marks are to contribute to the overall course CGS grade. Thus, for example, for a course assessed entirely by three in-course essays, Schools should inform students

³ A script is defined as the totality of a student’s answers to a written examination paper i.e. the answers to the required number of questions per paper.

of their individual essay CGS grade (usually via [MyAberdeen](#) Grade Centre) and the Student Record (or Student Record Card via the [Student Hub](#)) will inform students of their overall course CGS grade.

2.16 If a course is assessed by a combination of a written examination and continuous assessment Schools should inform students of their individual essay CGS grade (usually via [MyAberdeen](#) Grade Centre) and the Student Record (or Student Record Card via the [Student Hub](#)) will inform students of their overall course CGS grade. However, it is important for students to be able to see the grades awarded for individual questions in an exam; this gives them important feedback on which areas of the course they understand well and which they may need to work at. A breakdown of exam grades can be released to students via MyAberdeen if the MyAberdeen site is set up accordingly. If not, Schools should find an alternative way to give students this vital feedback on their exam performance.

Data Protection

2.17 Schools should be aware that data protection legislation gives students the right to request access to personal data held relating to them (including from 1 January 2005 such data held in manual datasets which are not structured by reference to individuals). This could include examination scripts and any written comments made by examiners on their assessments. Schools should therefore ensure that all Examiners, including External Examiners, are aware that their written comments on candidates' written examination scripts may be provided to students who make a formal application for disclosure of their personal data.

Section 3: Progression and Award within Postgraduate Taught (PGT) Programmes

- 3.1 Examiners will have the right not to permit a candidate to progress any further through a taught postgraduate programme if that candidate has failed a single course or more and exhausted all opportunities for reassessment on that course. Failure on a single course will normally mean that the candidate will not be able to meet the requirements for the award that they registered for.
- 3.2 Reassessment must be taken at the next available opportunity. Examiners may decide to withdraw any student from study who does not submit themselves for reassessment in a course at the next available opportunity without good cause or medical circumstances.
- 3.3 Candidates on a PGT Programme may receive one of three awards: a Postgraduate Certificate, a Postgraduate Diploma or a Master’s Degree subject to achievement of the necessary requirements. The Postgraduate Diploma and the Master’s Degree may be awarded with Commendation or Distinction.
- 3.4 Award is based on performance across the PGT programme as a whole. The overall grade for each course is used in the determination of the award with the credit value of each course determining their relative weightings. Where a course is a compulsory part of a programme but does not contribute to the determination of the overall award this must be clearly stated. In the case of zero-credit rated courses, the relative weighting of these towards the determination of the overall award must be clearly stated.
- 3.5 Achievement of a Postgraduate Award is based on achievement of credit.
- 3.6 Postgraduate Taught (PGT) students commencing their studies in academic year 2020-2021 will have their degree classification determined by the calculation of an aggregate Grade Point Average (GPA) as below.
- 3.7 The GPA and hence whether or not the award is to be made with Commendation or Distinction is determined by aggregating the Grade Points for each course taking account of the relative weightings in terms of credit.
- 3.8 The criteria for progression and award are as follows (and also summarised in [Progression and Award in Postgraduate Taught Awards \(GPA\) pages of the Academic Quality Handbook](#)).

Award of Postgraduate Certificate	Normally achievement of 60 credits with a grade of D3 or RP or better in all
Award of Postgraduate Diploma	Normally achievement of 120 credits with a grade of D3 or RP better in all
Award of Postgraduate Diploma with Commendation *	Normally achievement of 120 credits with a grade of D3 or RP or better in all and a GPA of 15 or above
Award of Postgraduate Diploma with Distinction **	Normally achievement of 120 credits with a grade of D3 or RP or better in all and a GPA of 18 or above
Award of Master’s Degree	Normally achievement of 180 credits with a grade of D3 or RP or better in all
Award of Master’s Degree with Commendation *	Normally achievement of 180 credits with a grade of D3 or RP or better in all a GPA of 15 or above, and a grade of B3 or above in the project / dissertation

Award of Master's Degree with Distinction **	Normally achievement of 180 credits with a grade of D3 or RP or better in all, a GPA of 18 or above, and normally a grade of A5 or above in the project / dissertation
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* Candidates achieving a GPA of greater than 14.49, but less than 15 (i.e. between 14.50 and 14.99) will be considered borderline for the purposes of award of Pg Diploma or Master's Degree with Commendation

** Candidates achieving a GPA of greater than 17.49, but less than 18 (i.e. between 17.50 and 17.99) will be considered borderline for the purposes of award of PG Diploma or Master's Degree with Distinction

The GPA is determined by aggregating the Grade Points for each course taking account of the relative weightings in terms of credit as follows:

- **Step 1:** For each course, calculate Course contribution to GPA, i.e. Course GPA [grade point x course weight / total credits taken at that level]
- **Step 2:** Combine the weighted GPAs to gain overall GPA

Two illustrative examples are given below:

EXAMPLE 1					
Course	Weighting (credit points)	Grade	Grade Point	Course GPA	Calculation
Stage 1					
AB5001	15	B1	17.40	1.45	17.40 x 15/180
AB5002	15	B3	15.30	1.28	15.30 x 15/180
AB5003	15	C2	13.90	1.16	13.90 x 15/180
AB5010	15	C3	12.00	1	12.00 x 15/180
Stage 2					
AB5510	30	C2	13.00	2.17	13.00 x 30/180
AB5501	30	B2	16.00	2.67	16.00 x 30/180
Stage 3					
AB5901	60	B2	16.00	5.33	16.00 x 60/180
	Total credits = 180	Total GPA = 15.06 As the student has achieved 180 credits with a grade of D3 or RP or better in all, a GPA of 15 or above, and a grade of B3 or above in the project / dissertation the student receives a Master's degree with Commendation			

EXAMPLE 2					
Course	Weighting (credit points)	Grade	Grade Point	Course GPA	Calculation
Stage 1					
EC5001	15	D1	11.52	0.96	11.52 x 15/180
EC5002	15	B2	16.75	1.40	16.75 x 15/180
EC5003	15	D1	11.82	0.99	11.82 x 15/180
EC5010	15	C3	12.00	1	12.00 x 15/180
Stage 2					
EC5510	30	C2	13.00	2.17	13.00 x 30/180
EC5501	30	B2	16.00	2.67	16.00 x 30/180
Stage 3					
EC5901	60	B2	16.00	5.33	16.00 x 60/180
	Total credits = 180	Total GPA = 14.52 As the student has achieved 180 credits with a grade of D3 or RP or better in all, their GPA falls within the 14.50-14.99 borderline category with a grade of B3 or above in the project / dissertation the student receives a Master's degree with Commendation.			

NB: All GPA calculations are computed to 2 decimal places

3.9 In exceptional circumstances, at the recommendation of the examiners meeting, candidates with a marginal fail in up to 30 credits may be eligible for the award of 30 Level 3 credits. This may only be considered if **all** of the following apply:

- (a) The student must have gained passes in courses amounting to 150 credits at SCQF Level 11
- (b) The student must have a GPA equivalent of at least C3
- (c) The student must have either had MC or GC in their first opportunity to sit the course and marginally failed the resit or have marginally failed their first attempt at the course and had MC or GC for the resit diet. A marginal fail is called as a grade of either E1, E2, or E3.
- (d) The next available opportunity for the student to resit the course is not until the next academic year following completion of the programme.

3.10 The above is also applicable to the award of a Postgraduate Diploma or Postgraduate Certificate. In the case of a Postgraduate Certificate, only 20 Level 3 credits can be awarded.

Section 4: Borderline Candidates

- 4.1 Details of the GPA bands associated with each Postgraduate Taught Award are provided below. For students who commenced their studies in 2020/21, whose studies during 2020/21 were impacted by Covid-19 and were undertaking their studies on 18 March 2021, the University has agreed to **widen the borderlines from 0.5 to 0.99 of a GPA point**. This approach directly allows any student who might be eligible for an increase in classification to be considered at Examiners' Meetings.

Grade Point Average	Postgraduate Award
18.00-22.00	MSc with Distinction*
greater than 17.00, less than 18.00	<i>MSc Commendation Borderline Distinction</i>
15.00 – 17.00	MSc with Commendation#
greater than 14.00, less than 15.00	<i>MSc Borderline Commendation</i>
12.00 – 14.00	MSc
greater than 11.00, less than 12.00	MSc
9.00 – 11.00	MSc
greater than 8.00, less than 9.00	<i>Borderline Fail/MSc</i>
0.00 – 8.00	Fail

*The award of Distinction normally requires a Project grade of A5 or above

The award of Commendation normally requires a Project grade of B3 or above

- 4.2 Where a candidate is borderline for a higher class of degree, Examiners' Meetings will use discretion to determine whether it would be appropriate to award the higher degree outcome. For students who commenced their studies in 2020/21, whose studies were impacted by Covid-19, Examiners will, without further consideration, award students in the following borderline categories, the higher degree outcome as outlined below.

Grade Point Average	Postgraduate Award
greater than 17.49, less than 18.00	MSc with Distinction*
greater than 14.49, less than 15.00	MSc with Commendation#
greater than 11.49, less than 12.00	MSc

*The award of Distinction normally requires a Project grade of A5 or above

The award of Commendation normally requires a Project grade of B3 or above

- 4.3 If a candidate's degree outcome falls within published borderlines, but they are not eligible for the automatic award of the higher degree classification/award, Examiners should consider **individual circumstances, on a case by case basis**, to determine the degree outcome which should be awarded. In doing so, Examiners' meetings will consider, where applicable:

- **Grade Profile:** across PGT courses (for example, if the majority of grades are in the higher award, the examiners may consider this as grounds for upgrading);
- **Exit velocity** (NB: At *postgraduate taught* level, this can only be considered if it is relevant to your programme. If there is evidence that you have performed sufficiently better in later parts of your PGT programme this could be considered equivalent to exit velocity);
- **Mitigating circumstances:** Candidates are, through published procedures for doing so, invited to submit supporting statements and/or evidence to provide Examiners with information on the mitigating circumstances they have experienced.

- 4.4 **Viva voce exams are not permitted** for determining the final classification of borderline students.

- 4.5 In all borderline cases, the rationale for the final degree class or postgraduate award given must be clearly recorded in the minutes of examiners' meetings.

Section 5: Mitigating Circumstances / Impaired Performance

5.1 Mitigating circumstances/good cause (MC/GC) indicate that a student has suffered some illness or other personal difficulties which have affected their performance in an assessment or prevented them submitting an assessment or sitting an exam. Students are required to inform the University in good time⁴.

5.2 MC/GC circumstances can impact on both course grades and overall degree classification. **It is not possible to adjust the grade awarded for an assessment that is thought to have been affected by mitigating circumstances.** For example, a student submits an assignment and is awarded a C2 by the marker. The School are aware that the student has submitted a medical certificate showing that they were unwell in the lead up to the assignment and are content that this is genuine and that the grade awarded is not representative of the student's normal work. Even having accepted this, it is not possible for the Examiners to make a judgement about the extent of the impact and thereby to determine the compensation which should be applied to the obtained grade, i.e. it is not possible to change the grade awarded; the work cannot be graded at B2, for example, as it is not of a standard that warrants a B2. How Schools should deal with MC/GC is outlined below.

5.3 At course level:

If the Examiners are confident that the assessments already completed by the candidate prior to the mitigating circumstances provide evidence that they have met ALL the learning outcomes of the course then, subject to at least 70% weighting of the assessments for the course having been completed, an overall grade for the course may be returned on the basis of the prior assessments. For example, if a student has failed to submit (or performs badly in) one essay or lab report counting for 20% of the overall course grade due to MC/GC but all the learning outcomes of the course have been met through other essays or lab reports, the examiners may set aside this missed or underperformed assessment and the overall course grade will be calculated on the 80% of the course that has been completed.

Where less than 70% weighting of the components of assessment for the course have been completed, the affected assessment(s) should be set aside and the candidate should (wherever possible) be given another opportunity to take the assessment(s) with the affected attempt(s) discounted. For example, if a student has long-term, intermittent health issues which have affected several assessments that contribute 50% of the course grade that student must be offered an opportunity to retake the affected assessments (or the entire course) with the first sitting(s) being discounted.

Where the Examiners do not consider the grounds presented to be sufficient good cause, the assessment should be treated in the same way as it would have been had no mitigating evidence been submitted. No partial compensation for good cause can be given.

5.4 At degree classification level:

Where the Examiners agree that illness or other good cause has impacted on performance it is important to determine whether or not that has already been taken into account at course level. *MC/GC cannot be taken into account at both course level and degree classification level* and can only be considered for students who are at a borderline between one degree classification and another. If mitigating circumstances have not already been considered at course level the Examiners' meeting may consider this as justification for moving that student into the higher degree classification.

⁴ The University's Student Absence Policy is available [here](#).

Section 6: Resits: Reassessment & Award of Compensatory Credit

- 6.1 With the exceptions listed in Section 5 above, PGT Students who fail, or who fail to attend or complete, a course for whatever reason and who wish to be awarded credit for the relevant course will be required to resit.
- 6.2 Resits for projects/dissertations are only permitted for candidates who achieve a marginal fail (E1, E2, or E3).
- 6.3 In order to be eligible to take a resit, a candidate must hold a valid class certificate. The validity of a class certificate is limited to the academic year in which it is awarded and to the academic year immediately following. Candidates holding a valid class certificate are permitted a total of two opportunities of assessment within this period.
- 6.4 Where a candidate fails a resit they will not normally be permitted to progress into the next stage of the programme.
- 6.5 Grades achieved at resit are marked as either 'resit pass' (RP) or 'resit fail' (RF). RP are capped at CGS D3 when calculating the Grade Point Average and for pass / commendation or distinction awards.
- 6.6 Resits should take place as soon as possible after the initial examination diet. The timing of resit examinations is determined by individual Schools. For some courses or for some assessments it may not be possible to have the resit until the next academic year.

Section 7: Students who take extra credits at PGT

- 7.1 If a PGT student takes extra credit, e.g. 10 credits, the GPA calculation would be out of 190 credit points and not 180cp. Students should be made aware of all the implications of taking additional credit on top of a full curriculum.
- 7.2 Schools must ensure that students are made aware of the implications of taking additional credit.