

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

Grades Management in MyAberdeen: Transparency and Enhancing the Return of Grades to SRS

1. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

This paper outlines the varied practice for managing grades in the gradebook of course areas in MyAberdeen, the institutional virtual learning environment, and makes recommendations for enhancing the transparency of grade management and for enhancing the return of grades from MyAberdeen to SRS. The latter will ultimately result in reduced workloads for staff and a more robust and secure grades transfer process.

This paper is for discussion and approval.

2. PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED

	Board/Committee	Date
Previously considered/approved by	QAC UEC	25 September 2024 5 November 2024
Further consideration/ approval required by	UEC	14 January 2025

3. RECOMMENDED ACTION

The committee is invited to discuss and approve the following:

- All assessment grades in MyAberdeen will be published as grade points (e.g. 14, 16, 22) from AY 2025/26 onwards. The associated alphanumeric grade will no longer be published in MyAberdeen course gradebooks. If an assessment is graded in percent, the percentage will be published with an **additional** item in the course gradebook which displays the grade point for that assessment. This is for transparency and consistency, for students.
- Assessment grades to be represented as whole numbers unless it can be clearly demonstrated why the work can be graded to a grade point value to 2 decimal places
- The final overall course grade in MyAberdeen will be the grade point to two decimal places from AY 2025/26 onwards. This is to reduce staff workloads by removing unnecessary duplication.
- The terms “grade(s)” and “grading”, reflecting the use of the CGS for grading, and the University’s international outlook, to be adopted in documentation and communications, for consistency, from AY 2025/26 onwards.
- The establishment of a Task and Finish Group in early 2025 to scope the implementation of the grades journey, a more robust and secure grade transfer process from MyAberdeen to SRS.

4. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The move, over ten years ago, from the Common Assessment Scale (CAS) and Grade Spectrum to the Common Grading Scale (CGS) and Grade Point Averages (GPAs) has resulted in an evolution of our approach to managing grades using the CGS and mixed practice across the institution. The latter creates confusion for students and for staff.

The introduction of the CGS resulted in grades being presented as both alphanumeric grades and grade points respectively, e.g. D3 / 9, B2 / 16, A1 / 22. The alphanumeric grades provided an easier scale for external audiences to understand, and the grade points enabled a course grade point to 2 decimal places

to be calculated and used to determine the overall GPA for Honours degree classification and for progression and award for PGT awards.

Initially, the overall course grade in the Student Hub was only shown as an alphanumeric grade. This caused confusion for students who tried to calculate their programme GPA from their course alphanumeric grade by replacing it with the associated grade point. Such students could, understandably, not comprehend why their calculation differed to that performed by the institution. The discrepancy resulted from the institution's calculations using the course grade point to 2 decimal places, not the grade point associated with the course alphanumeric grade.

Steps were taken from 2019 onwards to change what students saw in the Student Hub and in MyAberdeen, in relation to their course component grades and overall course grade, to provide clarity and transparency to students in relation to their course grades and their programme GPA.

These included:

- In AY 2019-20 Schools were encouraged to show students their overall course grade point to 2 decimal places in MyAberdeen while enhancements were made to the Student Hub to ensure students were able to see their overall course grade both as an alphanumeric and as a grade point to 2 decimal places.
- In AY 2020-21 the practice of displaying a 17.65 as an A5 was stopped, so only grades between 18.00 and 18.99 would result in an A5 being displayed to students. At the time this was referred to as 'stopping the rounding up of grades' though nothing changed in terms of GPA calculations for degree awarding as these always used the course grade point to 2 decimal places.
- Showing students their course component grades as grade points, as this made it easier and simpler for students to calculate their course grade point to 2 decimal places, if this was not yet available to them. The move from Original to Ultra resulted in more Schools showing students course components as grade points, for transparency.

To encourage consistency and transparency for students, and prevent confusion from mixed practice across the institution, it is important to provide clarity on how we manage and present grades in the gradebook of MyAberdeen.

Students have been consulted on the recommendations provided in this paper (Appendix 1).

4.1. Presenting Course Component Grades to Students

Currently there is a mixed approach to displaying course component grades to students. Grades are currently presented as:

- CGS alphanumeric
- CGS numeric grade points
- Percentages, with details available in the course guide/handbook of the QAC-approved conversion from percentages to CGS

We recommend that:

- All assessment grades in the MyAberdeen course gradebook are shown as CGS grade points.
- For assessments that are graded in percentages, students should be provided with an additional item in their gradebook displaying the grade point for that assessment, as well as being provided with details of the QAC-approved mapping of percentages to CGS grades in the course guide/handbook.
- All assessment grades must be presented as whole number grade points unless it can be clearly demonstrated why the work can be graded to a grade point value to 2 decimal places.

It should be noted that staff must have the ability to override the grade point produced by a rubric, such as in situations where an essential outcome has not been met by the student. As with any grade in the gradebook that has been overridden, staff must articulate the reason for the change to the students.

All the recommendations made above ensure a transparent approach to calculating final course grade point values to 2 decimal places.

4.2. Presentation of the overall course grade

Students access their final course grades through the Student Hub, where they can access their grade for a course as:

- The CGS alphanumeric
- The CGS grade point to 2 decimal places

It is therefore not necessary to show students their Overall Grade in MyAberdeen both as a CGS alphanumeric and a CGS grade point to 2 decimal places, at the end of the course.

Providing the course grade as an alphanumeric as well as a grade point in MyAberdeen course gradebooks currently requires Schools to duplicate the calculations, which increases staff workload and can lead to errors. When final course grades are transferred from MyAberdeen to SRS, the SRS only uses the course grade point, which is provided to 5 decimal places and rounded to 2 decimal places in the SRS. The SRS will present both the course grade point and the associated alphanumeric.

We recommend that:

- The Overall Grade in MyAberdeen is presented as the grade point to 2 decimal places
- No change to the SRS which will continue to present overall course grade as both the alphanumeric and grade point to two decimal places

4.3. Terminology used in relation to the CGS

We currently use a mixture of grades and grading, and marks and marking, in our documentation and communications in relation to assessment. After the adoption of the Common Grading Scale, it was decided to align the terminology in MyAberdeen to reflect the fact that we provide grades, and grade work submitted for assessment. However, we still use the terms “marking” in our documentation and communications in relation to assessment.

We recommend that:

- The terms “grade(s)” and “grading”, reflecting the use of the CGS for grading, and the University’s international outlook, be adopted in documentation and communications, for consistency, from AY 2025/26 onwards.

4.4. Defining the scope of work for embarking on the Grades Journey

The “Grades Journey” in Blackboard is designed to streamline the process of transferring grades between Blackboard and our Student Record System (SRS). We currently do not use this functionality although it is freely available to us.

Key features of the “Grades Journey” include:

- **Automated Grade Exchange:**
Grades Journey allows for the automated exchange of grade data between Blackboard and the SRS, significantly reducing manual steps and the potential for errors.
- **Flexible Grade Transfer Workflows**
We can create customised grading workflows appropriate for the transfer of grades. For example, grades can be transferred to the SRS based on Course Coordinator or School Admin approval. This approach is usually desirable as it adds an extra layer of verification before grades are finalised.
- **Robust integration with the SRS**
The SRS can define items in the gradebook for retrieval by the SRS. The integration ensures that the grading data is consistent and up to date across both systems. It also avoids the time-wasting process of manually downloading gradebooks prior to their automatic upload to SRS.

We recommend that:

- We establish a Task and Finish Group in early 2025 to define the scope of work required for transferring grades between MyAberdeen and SRS using the “Grades Journey”. Such a group will include colleagues from IT, CAD, Academic Services, School representatives (Academic and Admin).

4.5. Next steps

If the proposed recommendations are approved, there will be a need for minor changes to Section 2 (sub section 2.1 and 2.2) of the Code of Practice on Assessment. The proposed changes to Section 2 are included in Appendix 2.

5. FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information is available from Professor Kirsty Kiezebrink, Dean for Educational Innovation (k.kiezebrink@abdn.ac.uk) and Dr Sara Preston, Senior eLearning Adviser, (s.preston@abdn.ac.uk) Centre for Academic Development.

[4 December 2024]

Freedom of Information/Confidentiality Status: Open

Appendix 1

Summary of responses from School Conveners / Class Representatives to the proposed changes.

School Conveners / Class representatives were asked to complete a form indicating their level of agreement with the following proposed changes.

There were 23 respondents to the form, representing a variety of disciplines:

- All assessment grades in MyAberdeen will be published as CGS Grade Points (e.g. 14, 16, 22).

All respondents agreed with this proposal.

- If an assessment is graded in percent, the percentage will be published with an additional item in the gradebook which displays the CGS Grade Point for that assessment

All bar one student agreed with this proposal.

- Assessment grades will be published as whole numbers, unless it has been clearly demonstrated how a Grade Point to two decimals was arrived at

5 students disagreed with this proposal. All others agreed.

- The final Overall Course Grade in MyAberdeen will be published as the Grade Point to two decimal places

All bar one student agreed with this proposal.

- The terms "grade(s)" and "grading" will be adopted as the standard terminology and webpages, MyAberdeen, documentation and communications will reflect this, for consistency (ie "marks" will be replaced with "grades" and "marking" will be replaced with "grading")

All bar one student agreed with this proposal.

Appendix 2

Extract of the Code of Practice on Assessment Reflecting Changes to Simplify the Return of Grades

Section 2: Marking

Subsection: Return of Grades

- 2.1 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-grades~~ 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 of the ~~if~~ individual essay grade ~~awarded, in grade point form, -(usually via MyAberdeen Course Gradebooks)~~ and the Student Record (or Student Record Card via the [Student Hub](#)) will inform students of their overall course [grade point and associated alphanumeric](#) grade.
- 2.2 If a course is assessed by a combination of a written examination and continuous assessment Schools should inform students of their individual essay grade, [in grade point form](#) (usually via [MyAberdeen Course Gradebooks](#)) and the Student Record (or Student Record Card via the [Student Hub](#)) will inform students of their overall course [grade point and associated alphanumeric](#) 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 [Course Gradebook](#) is set up accordingly. If not, Schools should find an alternative way to give students this vital feedback on their exam performance.