



Computing Science

Postgraduate Taught
Student Handbook

2024-2025

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Staff and Key Contacts

Head of Department: Dr Matthew Collinson, Meston 221, matthew.collinson@abdn.ac.uk

MSc Cybersecurity Programme Director: Dr Wanpeng Li, wanpeng.li@abdn.ac.uk

MSc Artificial Intelligence: Dr Dewei Yi, dewei.yi@abdn.ac.uk

MSc Information Technology: Dr Mingjun Zhong, mingjun.zhong@abdn.ac.uk

School Office: Meston Building G05d, ncspgt@abdn.ac.uk

Open 9.00am – 12.30pm and 1.30pm – 4.00pm

A full list of staff can be found at <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/ncs/departments/computing-science/people-158.php>

Communication with the Department

The Department of Computing Science uses e-mail and/or MyAberdeen as its main method of communication with students. It is vital that that you check your e-mail regularly for up-to-date course announcements, requests to attend meetings and so on. As Computing Science send emails often you should check it daily.

Key Educational Policies

Students are asked to make themselves familiar with the information on key University-wide policies, available [here](#). These policies are relevant to all students and will be useful to you throughout your studies. They contain important information and address issues such as what to do if you are absent, how to raise an appeal or a complaint and how the University will calculate your degree outcome.

Assessment

Feedback

Academic Integrity

Absence

Student Monitoring/Class Certificates

Extensions and Late Submission of Work

Student Discipline

The co-curriculum

Student Learning Service (SLS)

MySkills

Email use

MyAberdeen

Appeals and Complaints

These University wide education policies should be read in conjunction with this handbook, in which School specific policies are detailed.

Decolonising the Curriculum

1. At the University of Aberdeen, we are dedicated to decolonising the curriculum. Our courses reflect a commitment to diverse perspectives and a comprehensive understanding of global knowledge.
2. In line with our commitment to inclusivity and equity, the University of Aberdeen is actively engaged in the process of decolonising our curriculum. Our courses and programmes aim to emphasise a plurality of voices and perspectives.
3. At the University of Aberdeen, our courses and programmes are designed to challenge traditional narratives and incorporate a wide range of cultural and global viewpoints.
4. Decolonising the curriculum is central to our mission at the University of Aberdeen. Our courses are continually evolving to better represent a broader range of voices and experiences.

5. As part of our ongoing efforts to promote diversity and inclusivity, the University of Aberdeen is committed to decolonising our curriculum. Our courses aim to embrace the rich tapestry of human knowledge from diverse cultural contexts.
6. At the University of Aberdeen, we recognise the importance of decolonising the curriculum to create a more equitable educational environment. Our courses are designed to challenge biases and embrace global perspectives.
7. Diversity and inclusivity are fundamental to our educational ethos at the University of Aberdeen. We are actively engaged in the process of decolonising our curriculum to provide a well-rounded and equitable education for all.

Catalogue of Courses

The Catalogue of Courses can be found at <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/courses/> and contains the following information, and more, for each course:

- Course Overview and Description
- Course Co-ordinator
- Assessment and Feedback

Teaching Timetable

Once you have registered, your timetable can be found at <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/mytimetable/courses/index>

Attendance and Monitoring Progress

You should attend classes regularly and do the work of the course. The University operates a monitoring system throughout the academic year to identify students who may be experiencing difficulties with their studies and to ensure that students remain on track for their degree and satisfy the minimum attendance requirements.

If you miss **two** classes without good reason or fail to complete a continuous assessment you will be entered as C6 At Risk. Please read <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/students/academic-life/student-monitoring.php> for full information.

Absence from Class

You should submit an absence report (*via* any MyAberdeen course page or your StudentHub every time you miss a class for good reason. You will need to provide supporting evidence if you are absent for more than 7 consecutive days.

Absence from Exams/Impaired Performance

If you believe that illness and/or other personal circumstances may have affected your performance in an examination, or you have been unable to attend an examination, you must submit details through [MyAberdeen](#) Absence Reporting **on the day of the exam and certainly no later than three days following** the date on which you were expected to appear for the exam concerned. This is as per the University's Policy and Procedure of Student Absence. The policy, linked below, contains information on when supporting evidence (e.g. medical certificates) is required.

Absence policy and further information on Impaired Performance

<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/students/academic-life/assessment-exams-3377.php#panel1957>

MyAberdeen

MyAberdeen is the University's Virtual Learning Environment where you can access learning materials and resources associated with your courses. Access at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/myaberdn>

A number of resources have been developed to help you make effective use of MyAberdeen. See [MyAberdeen: Students | Toolkit](#)

Each course will have its own MyAberdeen page containing information you need for the course. It's important you check MyAberdeen regularly.

In-Course Assessment

In-course assessment (sometimes known as continuous assessment) forms an important part of the general assessment of your work. Submissions should be handed in according to the specific instructions of the member of staff concerned, which in most cases will be via the [MyAberdeen](#) online Blackboard system.

Note that we distinguish between two types of work which are completed in your own time and handed in:

- *summative assessment* which contributes marks to the overall assessment of the course; and
- *formative assessment*, sometimes known as "homework", which does not contribute to the overall assessment of the course. Submission instructions will be made available by the course Co-ordinator.

Feedback will normally be provided within 3 teaching weeks of the date of submission; if the deadline is close to the end of term, then feedback should be available, at the latest, during revision week.

Deadlines

Deadlines for continuous assessment will be listed in the Course Guide or your Course Co-ordinator will notify you of them at the beginning of the course.

Extensions

The University has a policy for the consideration of and, where appropriate, granting of extensions for pieces of assessment. Agreed extensions will be for the shortest reasonable time to allow the student to complete their assignment while minimising impact on their subsequent studies, and will usually **not exceed seven calendar days**.

Students should apply for extensions via the **Student Report and Request Tool on the Student Hub** or, where a student is unable to access the Student Hub, the extension request should be sent directly to the School concerned.

Please read the [Policy on Extensions and the Late Submission of Coursework](#) in full before requesting an extension.

Late Submission of Work

Late submission refers to submission of work after the published deadline without an agreed extension, and in the absence of exceptional circumstances.

Any assessed coursework that is submitted beyond the deadline, without an agreed extension, will be recorded as late and a penalty will be applied as follows:

- Up to 24 hours late, the grade will be deducted by **2 Common Grading Scale (CGS) points**;
- For each subsequent day, up to a maximum of seven days total, the grade will be deducted by a **further CGS point for each day**, or part of a day, up to a maximum of seven days late;
- Over seven days late, **a grade of G3 will be awarded**.

Further details can be found at [Policy on Late Submission of Work](#)

Marking

The University Common Grading Scale, CGS, provides a common marking scale which is used across the University. You can find full information at <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/infohub/study/CAS.php>

Some courses are marked in percentage or “marks out of”. Please see appendix 1 for the Percentage to CGS conversion table used in the School.

Exams

Term 1 course exams are held in December and Term 2 course exams are held in May.

There is another opportunity in the summer for those who fail, fail to attend or are unable to attend.

Deadlines and dates can be found at <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/infohub/study/exams.php>

You should note that CGS marks for summative assessments and overall course grades are provisional, pending confirmation by the External Examiners following the May exam diet.

Progression and Award

Information on progression requirements and how your degree will be classified can be found at [PGT Award and Classification | StaffNet | The University of Aberdeen \(abdn.ac.uk\)](#)

Student Support

If you have a problem related to the course please speak to the lecturer or course co-ordinator in the first instance. If you feel unable to discuss the problem with them, and it affects the whole class, you can raise the issue with the Class Rep. Otherwise, you can arrange to meet with the Head of Department.

If you have personal problems please talk to your Personal Tutor or the member of staff you feel most comfortable with. If you would prefer to talk to a non-academic member of staff you can contact the Advice and Support Office.

Advice and Support Office

Based in the Students' Union Building, the Student Advice and Support team offers impartial and confidential advice and support on a range of issues, including finance, disability information and more. Further information at <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/infohub/support/advice.php>

Academic Language and Skills Support

For students whose first language is not English, the Language Centre offers support with Academic Writing and Communication Skills.

Academic Writing

These classes will highlight the common features of academic writing in English. To help with possible differences in writing styles and expectations:

- each session focuses on one aspect of the writing process
- you will work with examples of academic writing
- you will develop skills to produce effective writing
- an opportunity for you to ask questions about writing
- a relaxed and supporting environment

Academic Communication Skills

Introductory discussion activities, introduction to academic cultures, and mini discussions.

- Problems & solutions: language & discussion.
- Analysis and evaluation from different perspectives: language & discussion. Mini presentations.
- Comparing & contrasting, drawing conclusions, and evaluating: language & discussion.
- To be confirmed (participants will be contacted nearer the time to confirm content).

And **Fluency & Communication** which is more relaxed and focused on social communication.

More information and how to book a place can be found [here](#)

Academic Integrity (Plagiarism/Collusion/Contract Cheating)

The University expects that **all students** will undertake their studies with integrity and will submit assessments that have been prepared by themselves. To do otherwise, to act dishonestly and cheat in an assessment, is classed as academic misconduct and will incur penalties.

Ensure you understand the meaning of academic misconduct, how you can avoid it and what the penalties are should you act dishonestly.

Please read the following carefully:

[Academic Integrity | Students | The University of Aberdeen \(abdn.ac.uk\)](#)

[Academic Integrity & Referencing | Digital Skills | Toolkit | The University of Aberdeen \(abdn.ac.uk\)](#)

[Code of Practice in Student Discipline \(Academic\).pdf \(abdn.ac.uk\)](#)

Further Guidance on Avoiding Plagiarism

Where a written report or essay contains quotes or paraphrases of the work of others these must be clearly identified and acknowledged. In particular **quotes should be enclosed in quotation marks, with an appropriate reference.**

Given that it is very easy to copy software, the potential exists for plagiarism in the submission of coursework. These notes are supplied to help you avoid any risk of committing plagiarism. The term 'code' stands for any software or data processed by or produced on a computer system, whether its form is textual, graphical or otherwise.

All code submitted for assessment must be clearly annotated with the name of the student submitting the exercise and the date of completion.

Where an assessment exercise contains code which was not written by the student submitting the exercise or contains code written by that student at another time, the code in question must be clearly identified and annotated with author's name, copyright owner's name (if different), date of completion or publication, and source reference e.g. bibliographical reference or URL (for Web pages).

In principle, discussion of course material and non-assessed exercises with other students is encouraged, since such discussion generally helps all involved to understand the subject better. However, unless stated otherwise by the Course Organiser, discussion of work to be submitted for assessment should be of a general nature and should not be about detailed design or coding. Work submitted for assessment should normally be individual work. If you do submit work that was produced jointly with someone else, or that includes sections that are the work of another student, then this must be clearly acknowledged and the code in question identified. The credit for the assignment will be based on the 'value added' by the student.

Similarly, although we encourage the re-use of existing software as good Software Engineering practice, the origins of such re-used software must be clearly acknowledged, and the code identified. The credit for the assignment will be based on the 'value added' by the student.

Certain courses will require that you work in teams; in such cases the Course Organiser will clearly set out any specific additional guidelines. In general, a written report on work carried out by a team must unambiguously distinguish between work to be accredited to the author alone and work to be accredited to another person or the team as a whole.

Do not succumb to the temptation of copying another student's work and attempting to disguise the fact that you have done so by clever editing (changing the names of identifiers, moving procedures around, etc.). The teaching staff are well aware of such possibilities and have methods for detecting such cheating if it occurs.

Do not agree to requests from other students to copy your work. In such cases both parties will be held culpable. In particular, make sure that you collect any printer output – do not leave it lying around for others to find.

If you acknowledge the source of any work which is not yours, then the Department will be able to assess your work on its merits.

Online Originality Checking of Assignments

Staff in the Department routinely use automated source code plagiarism detection software. These systems compare the work of one student with that of every other member of the class and can calculate the degree of similarity between submissions. You cannot disguise copying by changing the order of methods, altering identifier names, etc. These sophisticated systems have programmed within them a large number of known strategies for attempting to disguise copied work!

If you copy without acknowledgment, then this is plagiarism. All cases are reported to the University's Academic Registrar, and if you are found guilty, penalties include the awarding of zero marks for the assessment concerned, the entire course, or ultimately, in serious cases, the award of no degree at all.

Library Workshops

The Library provide many resources on Information Skills and Academic Integrity which must be watched/read at the start of your course. There is a compulsory Avoiding Plagiarism Quiz that all PGT students must take.

All resources can be found in the MyAberdeen Organisation **Natural and Computing Sciences Student Information for Taught Postgraduates**.

Class Representatives

Class representatives are elected on an annual basis. Any students registered within a course/year or programme that wishes to represent a given group of students can stand for election as a class representative. You will be informed when the elections for class representatives will take place.

You can ask your class rep at any time to bring up matters of concern with any member of staff.

What will it involve?

It will involve speaking to your fellow students about the course/year you represent. This can include any comments that they may have. You will attend a Staff-Student Liaison Committee and you should represent the views and concerns of the students within this meeting. As a representative you will also be able to contribute to the agenda. You then feed back to the students after this meeting with any actions that are being taken.

Class reps are encouraged to meet with course co-ordinators early in each half-session to introduce themselves and to ensure an effective channel of communication is established between the class and the teaching staff.

Training

Training for class representatives will be run by the Students Association. Training will take place in the fourth or fifth week of teaching each semester.

For more information about the class representative system visit <http://www.ausa.org.uk>.

Staff-Student Liaison Committees

These meet twice a year to discuss matters of joint concern. If there are any matters that you would like discussed, take the initiative and see your class rep. Minutes of the meetings are available in MyAberdeen.

Course Feedback

Towards the end of each course, you will be invited to complete a Course Feedback Form. Once completed, they are considered by the relevant course co-ordinator, Programme Director as well as the School Director of Education. Ultimately, the University will consider the points raised in all Course Feedback Forms to ensure teaching is of a high quality. The University greatly values your comments and they do help when we are working on ways to improve what we are able to offer.

External Examiners

The department's External Examiners for each programme are:

- MSc Information Technology - Dr Penny Hart, University of Portsmouth
- MSc Artificial Intelligence – Dr Dimitra Gkatzia, Edinburgh Napier University
- MSc Cybersecurity – Dr Yanlong Zhang, Manchester Metropolitan University

You should note that this is for information only and under no circumstances are students allowed to contact external examiners directly.

Access to the Building

Access to most buildings does not require authorisation during the main University opening times. This is with the exception of the Library, which requires students to use their ID card to access upper floors.

Certain terminal rooms are fitted with combination locks. The codes will be issued to those groups entitled to use the relevant equipment. These codes must not be passed on to anyone who is not entitled to have them. The locks must not be left 'on the latch' outside normal hours, and if you find a room in such a state, it is your duty to lock it.

Entry to Building after Normal Hours

Normal hours are defined as being from 09.00-18.00, Monday through Friday. Access outside normal hours will require the use of your student swipe card to the Meston Building. It is to be noted that access to the building is restricted to people with authorised swipe card access. **You should allow no-one else to enter the building with you or to enter as you leave.** Access to rooms in the Department is restricted to Computing Science students, MSc/PgDip, research students and staff. Level 5 postgraduates can have access to the Meston Building after hours. Please see Sheryl Mackay (Room G05d).

In order that everyone in the building can be accounted for in the case of Fire or other serious incident, anyone using the building outside normal hours must record their entry and exit times and location in the book at the porter's desk inside the front door at the north entrance to the building.

The times that you are allowed to be in the building are:

- 06:00 – 23:00 every day

If you are in the building late in the evening, be aware that the cleaners may need access to the rooms at some point and be prepared to vacate them when asked.

Food & Drink

No food or drink may be taken into any of the Department's computer rooms, (e.g. 203, 204 or 311). Spills, crumbs, etc can ruin valuable equipment. Sanctions will be applied if this rule is not observed.

Level 5 students may use the kitchen **outside normal working hours**. However, you are allowed to bring your own supplies and take them away when you have finished. This is a privilege, not a right, and will be withdrawn if abused!

There is a drinking water filter in the kitchen which can be used to fill water bottles.

We are all responsible for keeping the kitchen clean and tidy.

IT Services Classrooms

It is possible to gain access to certain IT Services classrooms outside normal hours; see <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/dit/student/class/index.php>

Fire

If you are in the Meston Building when the Fire Alarm goes off, leave the building immediately. Even seconds can make a big difference. It is not possible in general to determine the seriousness of an alarm, so be prepared for the worst and act quickly. Listen to and obey the instructions of the Fire Stewards. Our assembly area is **in front of the Sir Duncan Rice Library**; please go there and **do not block the area at the front of the Meston building**.

We have several official alternative exit routes:

- Main staircase, exit through front door
- South staircase to ground floor, then along corridor to front door again
- Two direct external exits through fire doors to external staircase at the end of the West corridor (beyond rooms 204/205) and East corridor (beyond rooms 225/226).

The **recommended** exits from our floor are the external staircases at the West and East end, where escape is likely to be quickest; the main exit on the ground floor can get congested.

Check the various exit points so that you can find them quickly in an emergency. Read the fire notices. Find out where fire equipment is kept. When you are in other parts of the university, you should also be familiar with exit routes.

There is a routine test of the Fire Alarm system in the Meston Building at 7:30am on Wednesday mornings and there is no need to leave the building. **All other alarms are to be treated as real.**

Mobile Phones

Phones ringing and people talking on phones clearly make it difficult for other people to concentrate, and so mobile phones should **not** be used where they will cause distraction to others.

In lectures: mobile phones must be **switched off**.

In timetabled laboratory classes: *For expected urgent calls only*, mobile phones may be switched on, provided they are set to "vibrate" mode. Any such calls must be answered outside the lab, in an appropriate place. Please note that the corridor outside other labs or offices is not appropriate. We've had many instances of disturbances caused by excessive and loud phone conversations in corridors (probably because of the poor reception in granite buildings).

In laboratory classrooms, outside timetabled hours mobile phones may be switched on, provided they are set to “vibrate” mode. Any such calls must be answered outside the lab, in an appropriate place (see above).

Safety

The School Safety Officer is TBC

You are urged to review the contents of the School Health and Safety Policy at:

<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/ncs/information/health-safety-530.php>

Please do not hesitate to approach the Safety Officer with any concerns you may have about safety in the Department. This includes damaged electrical/other equipment.

Computer Systems

IT Policies

Use of IT facilities at the University is governed by a set of conditions. Breach of these can lead to a withdrawal of service, or disciplinary action if the breach is more serious. See <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/dit/student/get-started/policies.php> for full information.

IF YOU BREACH THESE CONDITIONS, YOUR RIGHT TO USE THE FACILITIES MAY BE WITHDRAWN AND THE INCIDENT REPORTED TO THE HEAD OF COMPUTING SCIENCE.

Other Useful Information

- Conditions for Using IT Facilities – details relevant policies
- Notes For Guidance – Guidance on the interpretation and application of the conditions
- Code of Practice for Electronic Publishing - Read this before publishing Web pages or posting contributions to news groups or e-mail discussion lists

<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/it/student/get-started/policies.php>

Study Outside the University of Aberdeen

The Aberdeen Software Factory

Students on advanced computing degrees, and students on the IT degree, who've completed two taught terms, are eligible to apply for part-time work in the [Aberdeen Software Factory](#), which pays students to collaborate on software development projects with live clients. If you're, eligible and interested in this, then send an email to Bruce Scharlau b.scharlau@abdn.ac.uk expressing your interest and explaining why you would be suitable. Please also include a copy of your recent CV highlighting your software development skills and experience.

Professional Computing Societies

A number of professional societies exist which serve the needs of Computing Scientists. All of them offer discounts on student membership.

British Computer Society

www.bcs.org

The British Computer Society (BCS) is a Chartered Professional Institution for the field of information systems engineering, the British Computer Society (BCS) exists to provide service and support to the IS community, including individual practitioners, employers of IS staff and the general public. Formed in 1957, the Society now operates under a Royal Charter granted in 1984. The BCS is also an Engineering Institution, fully licensed by the Engineering Council to nominate Chartered Engineers (C. Eng.) and Chartered Information Technology Professionals (CITP) and to accredit university courses and training schemes.

The first step is to see a local BCS representative for an application for Student Membership, which is heavily subsidised. This gives you copies of the Magazine and Journal, and details of local branch meetings in Aberdeen.

Association for Computing Machinery

www.acm.org

Founded in 1947, the ACM is an international scientific and educational organization dedicated to advancing the arts, sciences, and applications of information technology. It supports over 100 conferences world-wide each year, many of them organised by its special interest groups (SIGs). These groups reflect the interest of ACM members, and include programming languages, graphics, computer-human interaction, and mobile communications, just to name a few. A major feature of the ACM Web site is its Digital Library, which features electronic publication of ACM magazines, journals, and proceedings, with a six-year online archive and a bibliographical reference database going back to 1985!

IEEE Computer Society

www.computer.org

Founded in 1946, the IEEE Computer Society is the largest of the 36 societies of the Institute of Electrical & Electronics Engineers (IEEE). The Society is dedicated to advancing the theory, practice, and application of computer and information processing technology. Through its conferences, applications-related and research-oriented journals, local and student chapters, technical committees, and standards working groups, the Society promotes an active exchange of information, ideas, and technological innovation among its members.

Appendix 1 - Percentage to Common Grade Scale Conversion

% From	% To	CGS	
89.5	100	22	A1
84.5	89.4	21	A2
79.5	84.4	20	A3
74.5	79.4	19	A4
69.5	74.4	18	A5
65.5	69.4	17	B1
62.5	65.4	16	B2
59.5	62.4	15	B3
55.5	59.4	14	C1
52.5	55.4	13	C2
49.5	52.4	12	C3
45.5	49.4	11	D1
42.5	45.4	10	D2
39.5	42.4	9	D3
36.5	39.4	8	E1
34.5	36.4	7	E2
29.5	34.4	6	E3
24.5	29.4	5	F1
19.5	24.4	4	F2
14.5	19.4	3	F3
9.5	14.4	2	G1
4.5	9.4	1	G2
0	4.4	0	G3