

Academic Appeals Procedure for Taught Programmes

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Imperial College is committed to providing a high quality educational and student experience. This procedure reflects the commitment of the College to deal with issues at the earliest possible opportunity and, where necessary, to conduct investigations which are thorough, fair and ensure that decisions are made on the basis of the verifiable facts for each individual case.
- 1.2. This procedure applies to all registered students of the College including any members of staff who are registered as students on taught programmes leading to a full undergraduate degree (Bachelor or integrated Master including the MBBS programmes) or postgraduate taught degree (MSc, MBA, MEd, MPH or MRes). It also applies to taught aspects of EngD programmes. For research programmes students should refer the Academic Appeals Procedure for Research Programmes.
- 1.3. Students registered on collaborative provision will be advised within their student handbook which academic appeals process they should follow, in accordance with the Memorandum of Collaboration which governs the provision.
- 1.4. Under the College's Academic Feedback Policy, all students are entitled to receive feedback on their assessed work. Students are encouraged to ensure they have received and understood this feedback and, where appropriate, to have sought an arithmetical mark check, before making a formal academic appeal.
- 1.5. This procedure is aligned to the [UK Quality Code \(QAA\): Advice and guidance for concerns, complaints and appeals](#), and the [Good Practice Framework: Handling Academic Appeals and Student Complaints](#) (Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education).
- 1.6. The College adheres to the principles of natural justice and as such aims to ensure procedural fairness as part of these appeals procedures. Procedural fairness is defined by the OIA as following the College's own procedures correctly when conducting the process and acting fairly. Therefore:
 - (1) A student should receive copies of all information considered by the decision maker(s);
 - (2) Any staff involved in the academic appeals process are required to be free from reasonable perception of bias.
 - (3) Clear reasons will be given for the decision that has been made.
- 1.7. Every reasonable effort will be made to deal promptly and efficiently with all academic appeals, to investigate them thoroughly and objectively and to seek to solve them satisfactorily. Academic appeals will be dealt with positively and constructively. If an academic appeal is upheld, the College will seek to provide an appropriate response and take action as necessary. If an academic appeal is not upheld then the reasons for that decision will be clearly communicated to the student.

- 1.8 All academic appeals are dealt with confidentially but under the proviso that enquiries will have to be made in order to investigate the matters that are the subject of the academic appeal.
- 1.9 The time limits set out in this procedure will be followed. Where for good reason this is not possible, the student will be provided with an explanation for the delay and a revised timescale for completion.
- 1.10 Where the circumstances of the academic appeal are considered to be exceptional, the College may amend the procedure where it considers that this would be beneficial to the student. The reasons for any amendment to the procedure as set out in this document will be communicated to the student and recorded in the outcomes letter and the Completion of Procedures letter where one is issued.
- 1.11 Where a student making an academic appeal believes that they should receive reasonable adjustments to the procedures on the grounds of disability, this should be clearly stated in the submission. This would include the reason for requesting the adjustment and any suggestions of what this may mean, for example an alternative format to a hearing or an extended deadline.
- 1.12 If at any point in this procedure it is found that an academic appeal should be upheld, for example it is found during the investigation stage that there has been a clear error in the interpretation of the relevant regulations or new evidence is accepted by the Board of Examiners, immediate action will be taken to rectify the error without the need to hold an appeals panel hearing.
- 1.13 Students are strongly encouraged to seek advice and support should they be considering or preparing an academic appeal submission, such as from the Imperial College Union Advice Centre, Disability Advisory Service, Senior Faculty tutor or personal tutor as appropriate.

2. What is an academic appeal?

- 2.1. The College has defined an academic appeal as:

“A request for a review of a decision of an academic body charged with making decisions on student progress, assessment and awards”

This definition is in accordance with the definition provided in the UK’s Quality Assurance Agency’s Quality Code: *Advice and guidance for concerns, complaints and appeals* and is also used by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).¹

- 2.2. Making an academic appeal allows you to request additional information relating to the outcome of your assessed work, progression and/or award. However, this procedure should only be used where there are grounds to do so and should not be used simply because a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of their assessment or other decision concerning their academic progress.
- 2.3 The College does not accept academic appeals challenging academic judgement. Academic judgement is defined by the OIA as *“a judgement that is made about a*

¹ *Good Practice Framework: Handling Complaints and Academic Appeals*, Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education [available at <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/resources-and-publications/good-practice-framework/handling-complaints-and-academic-appeals/complaints-and-academic-appeals/>]

matter where only the opinion of an academic expert is sufficient".² For example the final grading of assessment, subsequent to the adherence to clear marking and moderation procedures, is an academic judgement.

The academic appeals procedure in summary

- 2.4. Where students are unclear about any results from assessment or the decision made by the Board of Examiners or Mitigating Circumstances Panel, they should first contact their department and seek guidance on their results to understand the marks that they have been given, the decision-making process or to request an arithmetical mark check (see paragraph 2.5).

Where a student remains unhappy with the outcome, they can submit an academic appeal where there are demonstrable grounds. There are three parts of the academic appeals process with two formal stages.

2.5. Arithmetical mark check

- 2.5.1. If a student believes that there has been an administrative error in the recording of their marks for a piece of assessment, they can contact their department and request an arithmetical mark check, without having to submit a formal request for an academic appeal. The request should be made within 10 working days of the publication of the results. Students are advised that if there was in fact an administrative error, it is possible that upon correction of this error, the mark could be adjusted upwards or downwards.
- 2.5.2. Marking is a matter of academic judgement, as set out in paragraph 2.3, and appeals will not be considered where a student is simply unhappy with their results.

2.6. Grounds for making a formal academic appeal (see paragraphs 3 to 4)

- 2.6.1. A student can only make an academic appeal following the formal publication of results on the following grounds:
- (1) that there has been a material procedural irregularity in the conduct of the assessment or the consideration of the student's academic profile, i.e. that the College has not followed its own procedures;
 - (2) that there has been a material procedural irregularity in the conduct of the mitigating circumstances procedure;
 - (3) that there is evidence of procedural unfairness in the conduct of the assessment or the mitigating circumstances procedure.
- 2.6.2. A student cannot make an academic appeal which questions academic judgement as described in paragraph 2.3. However, the College can consider academic appeals on the grounds of procedural irregularity, which refers to *"an inconsistency in or a variance from the prescribed set of procedures that are usually followed"*. Where there is evidence of a procedural irregularity, the Appeals Panel will consider whether, in their opinion, it was likely to have had a significant adverse effect on the outcome for the student.

² On-line glossary, Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education [available at <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/information/glossary/>]

2.6.3. Reasons that are not normally considered valid grounds for an appeal:

- Appeals against academic judgement
- Retrospective reporting of mitigating circumstances that could have reasonably be made known to the College at the time. If applicable the mitigating circumstances procedure should be followed.
- Financial circumstances
- Housing/living arrangements
- Lack of awareness by the student of the mitigating circumstances procedure
- Complaints regarding the level of service provided (see [Student Complaints Procedure](#))
- Allegations of Bullying or Harassment by a member of staff (see [Harassment, Bullying and Victimisation policy](#))
- Requests to review the decision to require a student to withdraw from their studies that is not the result of academic failure (see [Withdrawals for unsatisfactory progress](#))

2.6.4 The College will not investigate appeals which it considers to be vexatious. The decision of the Academic Registrar that an appeal is vexatious is final, and therefore the appeal will be closed and a Completion of Procedures letter will be issued. A student making a vexatious submission may be referred to the [Student Discipline Procedure](#).

2.7. Review of the outcome of the academic appeal (see paragraph 5)

2.7.1. If a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of the formal stage of the academic appeal procedure, he or she can request a review. This can only be done on the following grounds:

- (1) a student believes that a decision on their academic appeal has not taken account of all relevant information, or because additional material information has come to light;
- (2) a student believes that there has been a material procedural irregularity in the academic appeals process.

Formal Academic Appeals Procedure

3. Submission of the academic appeal and initial filtering

3.1 Students must submit their academic appeal to the Registry within 15 working days of the formal publication of the result(s) against which they are appealing. Requests must be submitted using the approved academic appeal form (available from the [website](#)) and emailed to student.appeals@imperial.ac.uk.

3.2 It is a student's responsibility to ensure that they submit their academic appeal in accordance with the published deadlines and that they attach all relevant documentary evidence to support the submission with the academic appeal form. Where a student is unable to provide all the documentary evidence they wish to be taken into account by the deadline, they should advise of this with their academic appeal form submission and give an indication of the timescale when the evidence will be made available. The Registry will acknowledge the submission of the appeal and, where appropriate, will provide a final deadline by which all the evidence should be provided. The academic appeal will then be processed in accordance with procedure. Where it is felt that there is no valid reason for the non-submission of the evidence, the student will be advised that they must either meet the deadline as set out in 3.1 above or that the academic

appeal is ineligible under this procedure and cannot be considered.

- 3.3. When an academic appeal is received, the Registry will undertake an initial check that the academic appeal form has been submitted within the published deadline, that there is relevant evidence attached and that there are valid grounds for academic appeal. Where these conditions are met, the academic appeal will be formally acknowledged and the student will be advised of the indicative timescale for the consideration of their academic appeal in accordance with the procedure.
- 3.4. Where an academic appeal has been submitted beyond the published deadline and the student has not provided a reasonable explanation of the reason for the late submission of the academic appeal, with evidence where appropriate, the receipt of the academic appeal will be formally acknowledged and the student will be given one opportunity to update their submission. If the updated appeal submission does not provide a reasonable explanation and/or have supportive evidence the student will be advised that their academic appeal is late and cannot be considered. The student will be issued with a Completion of Procedures (CoP) letter which explains any further steps that may be taken in relation to the case.
- 3.5. In the event that the Registry believes that a student has submitted an academic appeal which might be more appropriately considered under an alternative procedure, such as a complaint, or late request for mitigation, the student will be contacted and advised of this decision and provided with further information. The student will be asked to confirm that they understand how their case will be considered and the appeal will be closed.
- 3.6. Where a student has submitted a case that could be dealt with in part as an academic appeal and in part as a complaint, the student will be contacted to explain how this will be done and provided with the indicative timescales for each procedure to be completed, as it may not be appropriate to deal with both issues concurrently.
- 3.7. Where the initial consideration of the academic appeal identifies that there is no evidence of grounds for academic appeal, or the grounds cited are not eligible for consideration the student will be written to within five working days and advised of the decision and provided with an explanation of why it was not accepted. They will be given one opportunity to update their submission. If the appeal is still considered to be ineligible following the updated submission, the student will be informed that the appeal is not accepted, and of their right to request a review of the decision under section 5 of this procedure.
- 3.8. If it is clear that the student is expecting an outcome which cannot be reasonably provided by the College, the student will be advised of this at the time their academic appeal is acknowledged.
- 3.9. Where the conditions of the initial filtering are met (on time, citing relevant grounds and with supporting evidence) the case will be considered in accordance with the formal stage described on Section 4.

4. Formal consideration of the academic appeal

- 4.1. Where an appeal has been considered eligible, the case will be investigated by a member of Registry staff who has had no previous involvement with the matter. Where appropriate, additional evidence which might assist the understanding of the case will be sought. This might include relevant records from Examination Boards or Mitigating Circumstances Panels, or statements from the Faculty or Department where the student is based. The investigation might also seek additional evidence from the

student where appropriate. This additional evidence, along with the submission from the student, will form the basis on which the appeal is considered.

- 4.2. The initial investigation and collation of evidence should be completed within 15 working days of the receipt of the appeal under normal circumstances. The collated evidence will be provided to the student with a deadline of 5 working days to provide final comment prior to the consideration by the Academic Appeals panel.
- 4.3. Following the deadline for comment by the student of the collated evidence, the case will be considered by an Academic Appeals Panel which will include three members of College staff, who are not from the same Department as the Student and who have had no previous involvement with the matter. The Panel will be drawn from a designated list of Academic Appeals Panel members, which is approved annually by Senate, and will be supported by a member of Registry staff.
- 4.4. The Academic Appeals Panel will consider the student's appeal submission and the collated evidence. One member of the Panel will be identified as the Chair of the Panel and will determine, with Registry, how the work of the Panel will be conducted and who, other than the members of the Panel, needs to attend a meeting (or respond, if the consideration of the academic appeal is conducted via correspondence).
- 4.5. The Academic Appeals Panel will not normally meet with the student at this point in the procedure, but should the Panel or student feel that a meeting would be beneficial then a meeting will be convened. The student can attend the meeting in person or by alternative means (for example by a telephone or video conference call).
- 4.6. The student will also be advised as part of the appeals procedure of the support mechanisms that are available to them and advised that they can bring a 'friend' with them to the meeting if they wish to. A 'friend' may accompany the student for moral support but may not be a solicitor or barrister acting in a professional capacity. For the purposes of this procedure, a 'friend' is defined as either; a registered student of Imperial College London, an officer or advisor of the Imperial College Union or a current member of staff at the College. With agreement from the Chair of the Academic Appeal Panel, the 'friend' may speak on behalf of the student.
- 4.7. The student will normally be given at least 10 working days' notice of any request to attend a meeting with the Academic Appeals Panel. If a student is unable to attend, they will be provided with one further opportunity to meet the Panel. If a date cannot be agreed with the student, the Academic Appeals Panel may proceed with their consideration of the case and the evidence provided in order to make a judgement. This is to ensure that the academic appeal can still be considered and concluded in a timely fashion. The meeting will, under normal circumstances, be held within 40 working days of the receipt of the appeal. Where a student's individual circumstances require an earlier resolution of the academic appeal, every effort will be made to facilitate this.
- 4.8. The Academic Appeals Panel will, on the basis of the evidence provided to them, decide that *either*
 - (1) there is evidence of a procedural material irregularity or unfairness and make a recommendation to remedy the situation

or

 - (2) that the academic appeal is rejected as there is no evidence of material procedural irregularity or unfairness.
- 4.9. The outcome of the formal stage will be communicated to the student in writing within 5

working days by Registry and will provide a clear explanation of the reason for the decision. If the academic appeal has been upheld, the student will be advised of the action that will be taken by the College with respect to the academic appeal and, where appropriate, advised who they need to contact in their Department or Faculty.

- 4.10. If the student is not satisfied with the outcome of the formal stage of their appeal, they will be advised of their right to escalate their concern to the review stage and will be provided with information on the procedure, timescales, and support available to them.
- 4.11. If the student does not escalate the academic appeal to the review stage, the College will close the academic appeal. The College will only issue a Completion of Procedures letter at this stage if the student requests one. This request must be made within six weeks of the student receiving notification of the outcome. The letter will make clear that the student has not exhausted the College's internal academic appeal procedures.

5. Review of academic appeals

- 5.1. If a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of the formal stage, including a decision that the case was not eligible (see paragraph 3.7), they can request a review in accordance with the grounds set out in paragraph 2.7 of this procedure. Any request for review must be made within 15 working days of the receipt of the academic appeal outcome letter.
- 5.2. Requests for a review of an academic appeal should be made in writing to the Head of the Central Secretariat and the submission should include the reason(s) why the outcome of the formal stage was insufficient and any additional evidence which the student wishes to be considered by the Panel. The Head of the Central Secretariat, or nominee, will evaluate the request for the review to ensure that it falls within the grounds as set out in paragraph 2.7.1 of this procedure. Upon completion of this evaluation, the Head of the Central Secretariat, or nominee, will acknowledge the request for review in writing within 5 working days of receipt.
- 5.3. Where a request for review is eligible, an Academic Appeals Review Panel will be convened, normally within 15 working days, to consider the submission. The Panel will be drawn from a designated list of Panel members, which is approved annually by Senate, and will be supported by a member of Registry staff and will not include any member of the Academic Appeals Panel from the formal stage.
- 5.4. The student will be invited to attend a meeting with the Academic Appeals Review Panel under the same arrangements set out in paragraphs 4.4 and 4.5 above. Where necessary a member of the Academic Appeals Panel, normally the Chair, will also be invited to attend to answer any queries on the decision-making process of the Academic Appeals Panel. If it is not possible to agree a date which the student can attend, the Panel will convene without the student and undertake the review on the basis of the evidence available to them.
- 5.5. The Academic Appeals Review Panel will be provided with documentation on the request for review and the supporting evidence provided by the Student. The Panel may request additional evidence from the Faculty/Department or seek additional clarification from the student or seek additional information from the Academic Appeals Panel.
- 5.6. The Academic Appeals Review Panel will decide that *either*
 - (1) the original decision in respect of the academic appeal should be overturned and the Review Panel should make a recommendation for resolution

or

(2) there are no valid grounds for review and thus the decision of the Academic Appeals Panel stands.

- 5.7. The student will be advised of the outcome of the review in writing within 5 working days and provided a copy of any additional documentation that has been considered at this stage by the panel. As this is the final stage of the Academic Appeal procedures, the student will be issued with a Completion of Procedures letter. Regardless of the outcome, the student will be informed of their right to escalate their case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) if they remain dissatisfied.
- 5.8. Where the Academic Appeals Review Panel upholds the request for review, the outcome letter will include the action that will be taken in response to their academic appeal.
- 5.9. Where the review has been rejected, the outcome letter will clearly explain the decision that has been made and the reasoning for this.

6. Record keeping

- 6.1. A confidential record will be kept of the academic appeal and of the outcome of the case in order that themes in academic appeals submissions can be identified, addressed and improvements can be introduced.
- 6.2. The Registry will hold the full academic appeal file in line with the [College retention timescales](#).

7 Monitoring and Enhancement

- 7.1. The Registry Quality Assurance Team, will prepare an annual report which will inform Senate of the number, nature and outcomes of academic appeals during an academic session. The report will also record any corrective action taken and identify any themes emerging from the academic appeals and make recommendations for enhancements to the academic appeals procedure or to College policy, procedure or practices.
- 7.2. An annual report will also be produced to reflect on any cases which have been considered by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

Approval details

First approved on:	<i>09 May 2018</i>
Approval by:	<i>Senate</i>
Sub-committee to monitor and review:	<i>QAEC</i>
Version no:	<i>Oct 2019, version 1.3</i>
Effective from:	<i>October 2019</i>
Full review in:	<i>Academic year 2019/2020</i>
Contact:	<i>Quality Assurance Team, Registry</i>
Updates (type):	<i>Oct 18: Update to mitigating circumstances references in line with agreed policy</i> <i>Oct 19: update to timeframe for appeal submission</i>