

Implementation guide for Academic Appeals Procedure 2017/2018

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This document has been produced to guide and advise staff on the implementation of the new Academic Appeals policy and procedure from May 2018. If there are any additional questions or areas of clarification needed following reading this guidance, please contact [Kirstie Ward](#), the Assistant Registrar (Academic Standards) for support in the first instance.

Introduction

1. The updated procedure was developed by the cross-College working party following a review of current protocols, feedback and casework outcomes, and with reference to recognised sector best practice, such as that identified in the Academic Registrar's Council guidance, and that of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) in *The Good Practice Framework: Handling Complaints and Academic Appeals*.
2. The underlying definitions and principles have not changed from the previous process. However, there has been a change to the consideration of late mitigating circumstances. This change and how it will be managed is included in the specific section regarding Mitigating Circumstances below.
3. This guidance also provides detailed information to support those responsible for responding to, or supporting students through, an Academic Appeal. Regular reviews of the documentation and casework outcomes may lead to updates to this guidance.

Scope

4. The updated procedure applies to all taught programme students from 14 May 2018. Academic Appeals received before this date will be considered under the previous process.
5. At the end of the current stage of their appeal under the previous procedure, it may be possible for the appeal to be 'transferred' to the new process. This will be looked at on a case-by-case basis, but the default position will be that the appeal continues under the previous procedure.

Confidentiality and GDPR

6. By their nature, appeals, particularly in relation to late mitigating circumstances claims, are likely to contain sensitive as well as personal information. It is important that this is acknowledged by ensuring that all claims are considered in a confidential manner and that due care and attention is paid to the secure storage and timely destruction of papers, in both hard and electronic form.
7. On submission of the appeal, students will be asked to confirm that they understand that their information will be shared only so far as it is necessary to fully consider the appeal.
8. Whilst it is expected that most appeals, should they go to a panel hearing, will be conducted face-to-face, it may be necessary to consider/ share information 'virtually'. The documentation must not be shared outside the EU (as it currently applies), must be deleted as appropriate from any electronic devices used to view it and/or any email accounts. Please be aware that sharing applies to the server/ service provider as much to the physical location of the person accessing the information. If there is any doubt of compliance to the relevant Data Protection legislation, an alternative method should be sought.

9. Students should also be encouraged as much as possible not to provide sensitive and personal data about 3rd parties. Where 3rd party data is supplied and is not necessary to the appeal it will be returned or redacted, and measures should be taken to limit any further dissemination. Further guidance on this can be sought from Registry, the local data protection coordinator or the Data Protection Officer.

Parents, partners and friends

10. Under UK law, after the age of 16, an individual has the right to confidentiality. This means that we cannot share information with any third party without written consent, unless we are under an obligation to do so (HESA returns, legal police requests etc.).
11. Therefore you should ensure that:
 - a. The person that you are communicating with (by phone or by email) is the student, for example you use the email address that they supplied or you are sure of their identity on the phone.
 - b. Correspondence is clearly directed to the student.
 - c. Where you are approached by a third party, no details are provided and that they are clearly informed that without consent, no information will be provided.
12. This does not mean that you cannot discuss generalities or procedures. For example you might explain the College procedure for marking, or the role of the External Examiner. You might explain how the degree classification system works, or what the uplift process is.

Reasonable Adjustments for students with a disability

13. Whilst the College is committed to ensuring that its processes and procedures are inclusive, there may be occasions in which changes need to be made to support a student with a disability. When a student with a disability makes an appeal, the College will consider any requests they make with regards to reasonable adjustments to the procedure.
14. There are a range of adjustments that may be considered appropriate, which will be dependent on the impact of the disability on the student. Examples include but are not limited to:
 - a. Extensions to deadlines
 - b. Amended format for submissions or procedural documentation
 - c. Additional specific supporter at a hearing (for example a disability advisor)
 - d. Change of venue to improve access
15. Each request will be considered on its merits by the College. Where requested adjustments are not granted, or alternatives are offered, the reasons for this will be clearly explained.

16. If a student makes a request for adjustments but they are not registered as having a disability, the College reserves the right to seek evidence to support that this is the case.
17. The outcome letter at each stage of the appeals process will clearly explain any reasonable adjustments to the process that have been made.

Student first steps

Informal resolution

18. Where a student has a concern about the outcome of the Board of Examiners, they should also seek clarification/ further information from the Department. This may help the student to understand how the classification was made for example, or how the marking and moderation processes is completed. This is not a formal part of the process, but staff are encouraged to facilitate these queries, as often concerns such about the way the final classifications have been agreed are caused by a misunderstanding of the processes that are used.
19. Where a concern shows that there has been an error, for example that the regulations were misinterpreted in some way, it is expected that this will be corrected immediately, limiting the impact on the student and not forcing the student into making a formal appeal submission.

Arithmetical Marks check

20. The OIA, in the *good practice framework*, stipulate that providing students with the opportunity to confirm that their marks have been recorded correctly is best practice.
21. This facilitated by allowing students to request an *Arithmetical Marks Check*. This was previously grounds for formal appeal but has now been removed and forms part of the informal resolution a student may take up. Students should make the request in writing, and it must be within **10 working days** of the publication of results. As each department has different arrangements for the administration of their programmes, the guidance provided to students at the department level, for example in the programme handbook, should be clear how a request should be made.
22. Whilst not specifically stated in the procedure, as requests must be made within 10 days of the board (and in previous years this was a grounds for appeal), students may not request backdated marks checks relating to former years, as any request regarding those marks should have been raised at the time.
23. As a result of the marks check, where an error is found, the profile of the student must be updated. This includes where the error was in favour of the student, i.e. that their mark is now lower. Students are advised of this is the procedure, but it is good practice to remind them at the time of the request that marks can go down as well as up where an error is found.
24. Departments are advised that as students have a time limit to submit a formal appeal responses to informal queries and requests for Arithmetical Marks Checks need to be dealt with in a timely manner.

25. Specific guidance for students on the particulars on their course of the marking, moderation and classification process will help students in understanding how their marks have been awarded and the decision that have been made regarding their academic profile and likely reduce the number of appeal and marks checks requested.

Appeal stages

26. There are 2 stages to the appeals process.
 - a. Formal Appeal
 - b. Review of Appeal
27. The formal appeal stage is the investigatory part of the process. The review stage should only consider if the formal stage has been conducted correctly, or to consider new material evidence.

Appeal submission

28. Students must submit an appeal within **20 working days** of the publication of results. They must complete the Formal Appeal Form in full, and supply the relevant evidence/documentation.
29. Students are reminded of the procedure and the deadline in the official notification of their results from the Student Records Team.
30. For an appeal raised on the grounds of late mitigating circumstances, the student must also provide a clear and compelling reason that the submission is late, and why it could not have been provided by the deadline of the mitigating circumstance policy.
31. The statement from the student should clearly outline the reasoning for the grounds of their appeal.
32. Eligible grounds are:
 - c. Procedural irregularity in the conduct of the Board of Examiners (or Mitigating Circumstances Panel).
 - d. Bias/perversity of judgement in the conduct of the Board of Examiners (or Mitigating Circumstances Panel).
 - e. New material evidence.
 - f. Late notification of mitigating circumstances (2017/2018 only)
33. It is the responsibility of the student to complete the form in full and to provide supporting evidence. A failure to understand the process or to provide the correct evidence when it is or could reasonably be expected to be available will not be grounds for a subsequent request for review.

Eligibility Review

34. All submissions will be reviewed for eligibility by a member of the QA team. They will not make a judgment of whether the *substance* of the appeal should be upheld or not. The review will be to decide if the appeal:
- g. is 'on time' (or where late that there is 'good' reason)
 - h. is on a fully completed form
 - i. grounds cited are eligible and explained
 - j. There is supporting evidence, where necessary
35. If one or more of the above is not met, the student will be given an explanation as to why, and deadline in which to submit an amended submission. If this submission is also not eligible the formal appeal will be rejected.
36. Students that provide appeals that are rejected as ineligible will be informed by Registry that they may ask for a review of this decision under the standards grounds.

Consideration of eligible formal appeals (late Mitigating Circumstances)

37. If the appeal is eligible, Registry will forward the full appeal file to the department to be considered by the Mitigation Advisory Panel (MAP), under their usual procedures.
38. The MAP will need to consider whether the rationale for the late submission is valid (and supported by evidence as appropriate). Please note that in the eligibility review Registry will only be considering if there is a rationale given for the late mitigation – they will not make a judgement on whether the rationale should be accepted or not.
39. If the late rationale is accepted by the MAP, they would consider the relative merits of the case in the normal way.

If the late claim is accepted

40. The Board of Examiners should reconvene to consider the case. This may be a smaller sub-section of the board if this is normal practice. The outcome of this should be provided back to Registry (student.appeals@imperial.ac.uk). Registry will be responsible for informing the appellant and student records of the outcome.

If the late claim is rejected, or the Board does not change the outcome for the student

41. This should be reported to Registry (student.appeals@imperial.ac.uk). The decision should give a clear rationale for the outcome. For example that the late rationale was not accepted as the evidence did not support the claim, or the late rationale was accepted however the circumstances described were not supported by independent evidence etc., or that whilst there was approved mitigating circumstances, the overall weighted average for the student was too far below the threshold for an uplift to be granted.
42. Registry will be responsible for informing the appellant of the outcome of the appeal. In the outcome letter Registry will inform the student of any relevant next steps,

which may include raising a formal appeal against this decision. This would be classed as a new appeal submission.

Consideration of eligible formal appeals (not late Mitigating Circumstances)

43. If the appeal is eligible a caseworker will be assigned to collate any relevant information about the appeal. This will normally include requesting a response from the relevant Board of Examiners/Department.
44. In completing a response to the appeal, it is not necessary for a department to convene a sub panel of the board to consider the case. The response should explain the decision that has been made, or respond to the points in the appeal.
45. If at this stage, the department decides that there has been an error, for example they have been provided new, compelling material evidence, it should inform the caseworker, and take the relevant corrective action (fresh decision by the Board of Examiners). The appeal will then be formally closed by the Registry.
46. Following the collation of supporting documentation for the case, the Caseworker will produce a short overarching report for the Academic Appeals Panel. This report will be factual and should not make a judgement on the appeal. The role of the report is to provide a clear picture of the submission that has been raised, any counter arguments or clarifications that have been put forward and to cross reference the documentary evidence provided. The report should also provide any relevant signposting to relevant College regulations and procedures.
47. On completion of the report, the full file (report and any supporting documentation) will be provided to the appellant. The appellant will be given 10 working days to make any comment with regards to factual accuracy. Following this period, an Academic Appeal Panel will be convened to consider the case.

Academic Appeals Panel

48. The Academic Appeals Panel will normally be Chaired by a Consul, with two additional members drawn from the Academic Appeals list, confirmed each year by Senate.
49. The Panel may decide to hold a full hearing with the student and a department representative present however, this may not always be required. The preference of the appellant will be considered with regards to whether a full hearing will be held or not.

Where a full hearing is not held

50. All panel members will be provided with the case file electronically. A member of Registry will act as secretary to the panel to support the panel in their deliberations.
51. The panel will be given a period for review, normally 5 working days. They will agree an outcome on the appeal collaboratively. This may be at a meeting or over email. The exact method will depend on the complexity of the case and the relative availability of the panel members to meet together.

52. The Chair, with the secretary, will ensure that each point of the appeal is considered, and that clear reasoning is given for accepting or rejecting any points raised. The secretary will be responsible for collating a final outcome report, to be agreed by the panel.
53. Once the outcome of the appeal is decided, the secretary will draft the outcome letter to the appellant, to be agreed by the Chair of the panel. This should be within 10 working days of the appeal submission being provided to the panel for their deliberations.
54. The secretary will then provide the appellant the outcome (letter and panel report) and advise them of any next steps that may be taken and the timescales for this, for example that the student may request a review, or that the outcome will be provided to a Board of Examiners to ratify a fresh decision on the matter. The department will be provided the outcome with the appellant.

Where a full hearing is held

55. Where a full hearing is held, the normal hearing procedures will be followed. The appellant will normally be given 10 days' notice of the date of the hearing. The appellant may bring a supporter to the hearing. This would be another member of the College community such as a tutor, fellow student or an adviser from the Imperial College Union Advice Centre. The appellant may not be represented by anyone in a legal capacity. A representative from the department will also be invited to attend.
56. The purpose of the hearing is to explore the issues, particularly where differences in opinion have been forwarded. The panel will agree that questions that need to be raised in a private meeting before the hearing.
57. The hearing is likely to follow the format below. There may be reasons to change the format, which will be clearly articulate to all parties at the beginning of the open meeting.
 - a. Introductions
 - b. Explanation of the format and decision making process
 - c. Invite the appellant to outline their case
 - d. Questions from the panel
 - e. Invite the department representative to respond
 - f. Questions from the panel
 - g. Opportunity for additional questions from the appellant or department representative
 - h. Closing statement from department representative
 - i. Closing statement from the appellant

- j. Confirmation of decision making process and explanation of how (and when) the appellant will be informed of the outcome.
- k. Private meeting of the panel. The panel will discuss the evidence that they have been given and make their decision.

58. The secretary will prepare a report which will include the details of the hearing. This will not be a verbatim record of the hearing. The secretary will also prepare the appeal outcome letter to go to the student, copied to the department. This will normally be within 5 working days of the hearing.

Where an appeal is rejected

59. When an appeal is rejected the student will be informed of the next stage of the appeal process, the grounds, procedure and timescale to do so. They will also be informed that if they chose not to request a review, they may request a letter to confirm that:
- a. They have not completed the procedures of the University
 - b. Details of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) complaint scheme.

This letter is known as a 'Non-CoP CoP'. It must be requested within 6 weeks of the outcome of the formal stage.

60. If a request for a review is not raised within the required timescale the College will close the case and no further action will be taken.

Where an appeal has been upheld

61. When an appeal has been upheld, the student will be informed of the steps that the College will be taking in response to this decision and the expected timescales for this.
62. Normally this would mean that an appeal case is closed however, the student would still be able to request a Non-CoP CoP should they so wish.

Where an appeal is partially upheld

63. A partially upheld appeal will prompt a hybrid outcome letter. This will explain what areas have been upheld and which rejected, with the reasons for this. The appellant would be able to able to:
- a. Request a review of those areas that have not been upheld
 - b. Request a Non-CoP CoP
64. They will be informed of the steps that the College will be taking in response to the parts of the appeal that have been upheld and the expected timescales for completion.
65. It is important to note that dissatisfaction of the outcome of an appeal may occur even where it has been upheld in full. The appellant may therefore chose escalate

their appeal to the review stage or to make a complaint to the OIA about the handling of their appeal. This may be for example as the resolution offered does not meet their expectations or that they consider that the appeal was not considered in a timely manner.

Review of Appeal stage

66. If dissatisfied with the outcome of the appeal, the appellant may request a review by writing to the Head of the Central Secretariat within 15 working days of the outcome of the formal stage.
67. A review of appeal is not a reconsideration of the original decision, the purpose of the review is to ensure that the appeals process has been followed fairly and correctly.
68. The submission must include the grounds for the request and where any new relevant evidence is provided it must explain the reason it was not available earlier in the process.
69. The request will be reviewed for eligibility, in the same way as the formal stage, by the Head of the Central Secretariat (or nominee).
70. Within 5 working days the appellant will normally be informed if the request was considered eligible. If it is not considered eligible a Completion of Procedures letter will be issued. If the submission is eligible, an Academic Appeals Review Panel will be convened, normally in 15 working days.
71. The normal panel hearing procedure will be followed, as outlined in the formal stage guidance above, though the department representative will be replaced with a representative from the Academic Appeals Panel (normally the Chair).
72. The outcome of the Academic Appeals Review Panel deliberations will be that either:
 - k. That the original decision in respect of the appeal should be overturned and the review panel will make a recommendation of resolution, or
 - l. There are no valid grounds and the appeals decision stands.
73. The outcome letter will give clear reasoning for the decision that has been made. They will be issued a Completion of Procedures letter. This may be combined if appropriate.

Monitoring and review

74. Registry will maintain case records in line with the retention schedule.
75. Anonymised data will be utilised to identify any trends or patterns in the data, put in place any actions that are required where there are clear issues, both in year, and across previous years.
76. This information and feedback received from those using the process will also inform any review of procedures and practice to enhance the provision.

77. Departments should note of the quantity and types of queries that are received at the informal stage. This basic recording will allow them to see if there are any areas in which improved processes and procedures, or student and staff guidance documents.

Case escalation beyond Imperial College, London

78. Where a student escalates a complaint to the OIA, or on rare occasion seeks to make a legal claim against the College, this will be managed by the Central Secretariat.
79. As a student may take up to 12 months to submit a claim to the OIA, it is important that the documents that make up the complete case file are held securely for the relevant period, before destruction under the College retention policy.
80. Normally all the required information will be held as part of the appeal case file, but occasionally the OIA may request additional documentation such as student handbooks or other guidance that has been provided to them. In these cases the Central Secretariat may need to contact the department for this information.
81. Where any letter purporting to represent a student in a legal matter is provided outside the Central Secretariat, it should be acknowledged as received, and immediately passed to the Central Secretariat for any formal response or action.