

ACADEMIC APPEALS POLICY RELATING TO GRADE CHALLENGES

Introduction

1. The policy outlined in this document is only for resolution of academic appeals related to grade challenges. All undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in courses offered by the University may submit an appeal relating to a grade challenge, either individually or as part of a group.
2. Grounds for a grade challenge appeal:
 - a. Mitigating circumstances exist. Mitigating circumstances claims must be supported by medical or other documentary evidence acceptable to the Academic Appeals Committee (AAC);
 - b. A procedural irregularity occurred;
 - c. A decision was manifestly unreasonable or influenced by prejudice or bias, or perception thereof, on the part of the decision-maker(s).
3. All grounds must be supported by evidence.
4. In line with the policies of the OIA and higher education practice, students may not appeal matters of academic judgment.
5. Students using the appeal process to bring frivolous or vexatious matters to the University's attention will be subject to disciplinary action.
6. Students found to have provided fraudulent evidence or falsified a claim will be subject to disciplinary action.
7. Appeals require time to be processed correctly. Appeals may result in delays in the confirmation of grades which may have an impact on progression and the timing of the completion of studies/graduation.
8. Information will be used and retained in line with the University Privacy Policy.
9. A grade challenge cannot be made to the Head of School/Department or designee by students if they have been found guilty of academic misconduct in an exam sitting with evidence. For example, if an invigilator finds a student to be using a mobile phone or smart watch, or written notes in an exam room, there is physical evidence to confirm that academic misconduct has occurred.

Stage I: Informal Grade Challenge to Instructor

10. Students may request an explanation of how a grade has been calculated for any piece of assessed work from their instructor. Such an explanation does not form part of the grade challenges and appeals procedures and is a routine and regular part of feedback to students. An instructor may revise a grade at this stage, at the instructor's discretion.
11. Students who wish to request the re-evaluation of a grade, based on the grounds listed above, should contact the instructor of the course within 5 working days of the grade's issuance and ask for specific clarification of the issue concerned. Students would normally be expected to have met with an instructor for feedback before making a challenge request.
12. The University expects resolution within 10 working days of the challenge request, though there may be a reasonable delay if the instructor is on annual leave or if the University is closed.
13. If the instructor is no longer in the employ of the University or is unavailable for other reasons, students will meet with the relevant colleague designated by the Head of School/Department.
14. If students do not receive a satisfactory outcome, they may file a formal grade challenge to the relevant Head of School/Department or designee within 5 working days of the outcome.

Stage II: Grade Challenge to Head of School/Department or equivalent

15. Students present a written statement outlining the grounds for the grade challenge to the Head of School/Department, or their designee, for consideration. This should be done within 5 working days from the instructor's response to the grade challenge/ 20 calendar days of the original grade release. For the avoidance of doubt, academic judgement may not be appealed when making a grade challenge.
16. An informal meeting may be called at this time by the Head of School/Department if necessary. Students may be accompanied to the meeting by a supporter. The supporter may prompt or provide advice directly to students but may not address the hearing committee unless invited to do so by the Head of School/Department.
17. The Head of School/Department, or a designee, will decide as to the merits of the grade challenge and attempt a resolution. He/she will prepare a written record, and this will be provided to all parties, in writing, normally within 10 working days from the start of Stage II/30 calendar days of the original grade release.

18. There may be a delay in the decision if a meeting or further investigation is required. Students will be informed of the timeframe.

Stage III: The Appeal

19. Students may formally appeal a Stage II grade challenge to the Academic Appeals Committee (AAC). This appeal must be lodged within 5 working days of the Stage II decision using the Academic Appeal Application Form: Grade Challenges and Non-Grade Related Appeals, along with appropriate supporting evidence.
20. Students must have exhausted the Informal Stages before proceeding to the Appeal.
21. In the case of a group appeal, one student, identified on the Academic Appeal Application Form will act as the lead student, with the other group members' names listed in the relevant section on the form. The University will only contact the lead student in connection with the group appeal. The University will expect the lead student to distribute the University's communications among the group and collate the group's response to the University's enquiries to give to the University. The University cannot be held responsible if the lead student does not accurately provide the views of any member of the Group or if they do not pass on information from the University.
22. A group appeal is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction by two or more students about the University's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by the University.
23. The University reserves the right to propose individual solutions to any group appeal.
24. Only the students about whom a decision has been made can lodge an appeal against that decision. Appeals from third parties are not accepted.
25. Students cannot normally submit an appeal after they have been presented to the University Exam Board to ratify their degree or exit award.
26. The AAC secretary will make an initial determination on administrative grounds whether or not the case can proceed to the Committee. An appeal may not be considered if there is no substantive case for the Committee provided to hear, no evidence is provided, or if there is no valid remedy open to the Committee.
27. If a case is to be heard by the Committee, a meeting will be scheduled normally within 10 working days of receipt of a complete appeal. The Committee will normally expect to resolve a case at this meeting, and a decision notice will be sent to students within 10 working days from the meeting date. The Committee may delay or postpone a

meeting to allow further evidence to be gathered; this will be communicated to students.

28. In the rare event that a formally instituted hearing is deemed to be necessary, this will be held within 15 working days of the receipt of a complete appeal.
29. At the hearing, students and faculty member may offer explanations of the situation to AAC, and the Committee members may ask questions of each. The Committee may also call upon other faculty members, staff, or students, to ask questions of them that will clarify any additional aspects of the case indicated.
30. Students may be accompanied to the meeting by a supporter. The supporter may prompt or provide advice to students but may not address the hearing committee unless invited to do so by the Chair.
31. The Chair of the AAC will prepare a written report on the AAC's decision made at the hearing, and a copy of this report will be provided to the student(s), the relevant Head of School/Department, and Registry Services, within 10 working days of the AAC hearing.
32. All AAC outcomes will be recorded in the reserved minutes of the AAC.
33. All documents and evidence submitted by students in support of an appeal will be treated as confidential and only seen by those directly involved in the appeal process

Stage IV: Further Appeal to the Office of the Provost

34. Students who choose to appeal the decision of the AAC may lodge a "Further Appeal" with the Office of the Provost. Only after all methods for settlement at the level of the Academic Appeals Committee have been exhausted can students lodge a further appeal.
35. The Office of the Provost will receive information from parties involved in a further appeal and conduct any further investigations or convene hearings deemed necessary.
36. The grounds for Further Appeal are:
 - a. New evidence exists that could not have been reasonably presented in the appeal to the AAC;
 - b. A procedural irregularity occurred in the conduct of the appeal process;
 - c. A decision was manifestly unreasonable or influenced by prejudice or bias, or perception thereof, on the part of the decision-maker(s).
37. Further Appeal procedures are as follows:

- a. Students must file a Further Appeal Form to the Office of the Provost requesting a review of AAC's decision within 5 working days;
 - b. In the case of a group complaint, one student, identified on the Further Appeal Form, will act as the lead student, with the other group members' names listed in the relevant section on the form.
 - c. If the Further Appeal is on the grounds of supplying new evidence, then this must be presented with the form;
 - d. The Office of the Provost will review the material presented at the original AAC meeting plus any additional information provided by the student(s);
 - e. The Office of the Provost will request additional information if necessary, and may pause the timeframes to allow this to be gathered and reviewed;
 - f. The Office of the Provost will make a final determination within 10 working days and students will be informed of the outcome.
38. The University reserves the right to propose individual solutions to any group further appeal.
39. At this point, the University's institutional procedures for appeals have been completed. The Completion of Procedures letter will outline for students the role of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.
40. If, upon the conclusion the University's institutional procedures students are dissatisfied with the decision, they may take their appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (<http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>). Students must first have exhausted all appropriate internal procedures at the University before approaching the OIA.

Special Cases: Mitigating Circumstances

41. It is the assumption that if students submit a piece of assessment or sits an exam, they are fit to do so and take responsibility for the grade received.
42. In the rare event that a mitigating circumstance did arise as students submitted the piece of assessment or sat the exam, and they wish to challenge the grade received based on the mitigating circumstance, students would need to explicitly demonstrate that they had an evidenced mitigating circumstance that would have affected the rational judgement necessary to deem themselves unfit to submit or sit the assessment(s).
43. If a grade challenge is based on this circumstance, the challenge with the evidence of mitigating circumstance should be submitted to the Head of School/Department (Stage II) within 5 working days of the grade release. If the Head of School/Department was the instructor, it should be submitted to the Head of School/Department from another discipline, nominated by the Registrar.

44. If evidence cannot be produced within the timeframe, students should still submit the challenge and the final date by which evidence can be submitted will be determined by the Head of School/Department or designee. Students will need to read the Mitigating Circumstance Guidance.
45. The Head of School/Department cannot make an academic judgement on the extent to which any mitigating circumstances might have affected students' performance. If the mitigating circumstance claim is accepted by the Head of School/Department then they will consider providing an alternative opportunity/alternative solution in consultation with Registry Services.
46. The Head of School/Department or designee will prepare a written record of the result and this will be provided to the student(s), instructor and Registry Services.
47. If an alternative assessment is proposed and a student faces mitigating circumstances in sitting or submitting the assessment, they cannot present the same evidence used in their earlier grade challenge.
48. All decisions will be presented at the subsequent School/Department Exam Board and University Exam Board.
49. If the challenge is not resolved to the student(s)' satisfaction, the student(s) will indicate this in writing to the Academic Appeals Committee using the Grade Appeals form within 5 working days of the Head of School/Department's or designee's decision and follow Stage III.

VERSION MANAGEMENT

Responsible Department: RAQA (Department of Registry, Admissions and Quality Assurance)			
Approving body: Academic Board			
Version no.	Key Changes	Date of approval	Date of effect
001		24 July 2018	28 August 2018
002	Corrected typos/updated date. Added point re: grade challenges and academic misconduct.	25 June 2020	11 August 2020
003	Added information on group appeals.	3 Sept 2021	6 Sept 2021
004	Updated Associate Dean to Head of School/Department. Clarified nomination of different HOS/D if they are the instructor.	May 2022	May 2022
005	Updated name of responsible department to RAQA	October 2022	October 2022
006	Updated University response time from 5 to 10 working days as per AB/UB decision. Clarified process for mitigating circumstances during assessment.	June 2023	September 2023
		Restricted access? <i>Tick as appropriate</i> ☐ Yes ☒ No	