

Academic Appeals and Grade Challenges Policy and Procedures

1. Introduction and Principles

- 1.1 The policy and procedures outlined in this document are only for the resolution of **academic appeals and grade challenges** of undergraduate and postgraduate students of Richmond, The American International University in London. In line with the QAA Quality Code and the OIA Good Practice Framework, at Richmond “An academic appeal is defined as a request for the review of a decision of an academic body charged with decisions on student progression, assessment and awards.”
- 1.2 At Richmond University, a **grade challenge** is a request for the re-evaluation of academic work in a course. This may include, but is not limited to, a grade, attendance, or compliance with course guidelines. Whenever a grade is changed as a result of a grade challenge, an explanation of the re-evaluation and outcome must be documented (Formal Procedure Stage I). An **academic appeal** is normally the challenge to the outcome of a grade challenge.
- 1.3 Note that this is distinct from the petitions made to the Academic Progress Committee, which deals with requests for exceptions to University Academic Policy. This includes standard categories such as petitions for re-sit exams, permission to exceed the normal courseload restrictions, etc. APC decisions are appealed directly to the Vice-Provost for Academic Affairs, and not via the Academic Appeals Committee (AAC).
- 1.4 Academic-related complaints not covered by this policy must be progressed using the “*Academic and Academic Related Complaints Procedure for Matters not Related to Grading*” (<http://www.richmond.ac.uk/student-life/student-complaints-and-appeals/>).
- 1.5 Appeals not related to academic matters (for example, those related to housing, financial services, disability services, and so forth) must be addressed using the “*Complaints and Appeals for Non-Academic and Non-Academic-related Matters*” (<http://www.richmond.ac.uk/student-life/student-complaints-and-appeals/>).
- 1.6 All undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in courses offered by Richmond University may request reconsideration of any academic matter in which they believe they have been treated unfairly, and may appeal any grade challenge outcome.
- 1.7 Only the student about whom a decision has been made can lodge an appeal against that decision. Challenges or appeals from third parties are not accepted.
- 1.8 **Decisions which may be appealed:**
 - a. A rejected grade challenge (see 1.2)

- b. Exclusion from: an examination, an assessment, a resubmission opportunity; or an internship;
- c. The result of a non-APC decision that prevents transfer, progression, or results in suspension of studies;
- d. Termination of study for academic misconduct or professional misconduct;
- e. Termination of study for failing to satisfy an examiner or Board of Examiners, including where a request for mitigation has been rejected.

1.9 Grounds for appeal:

- a. mitigating circumstances exist, that for good reason could not have been presented at the appropriate time, and that, if they had been known, it is reasonably likely would have changed the decision that was made. Mitigating circumstances claims must be supported by medical or other documentary evidence acceptable to the Academic Appeals Committee (AAC);
- b. a procedural irregularity occurred in the conduct of the assessment process;
- c. that a decision was manifestly unreasonable or influenced by prejudice or bias (or perception of prejudice or bias) on the part of the decision-maker(s);

1.10 Students may not use the appeal procedures to bring frivolous or vexatious matters to the University's attention;

1.11 In a review of any academic case, policies stated on a course syllabus and in Course Specification Documents will be understood to have been viewed and accepted by the student concerned;

1.12 Guidance and support for students making a grade challenge or appeal is available from the Office of Student Affairs and Registry Services. A student may withdraw his or her grade challenge or appeal at any time, thereby halting the process. Once a grade challenge or appeal has been halted it cannot be reinstated on the same grounds;

1.13 The University pledges that students studying at all levels have the opportunity to raise matters of concern without the risk of disadvantage.

2. Time Frames for Filing a Grade Challenge or Appeal

2.1 Informal resolution of grade challenges should normally be sought with the instructor prior to engaging in formal procedures. The expected timeframes for informal resolution is 14 calendar days – 7 days from the issuance of the grade for the student to submit a request for re-evaluation, and a further 7 days for the instructor to address this. See section 4 below.

2.2 All formal grade challenges and appeals must normally be settled within the semester of filing the Stage I grade challenge with the instructor or Associate Dean of the School.

- 2.3 Students filing a Stage I grade challenge should normally do so within 3 weeks of the grade release (following pursuit of an informal resolution as above). Stage I grade challenges or appeals will not normally be accepted after the end of week 3 of the semester following that in which the grade was issued. Where a meeting is not deemed to be necessary, the decision will be communicated to the student within 7 calendar days. Where a meeting is required, a further 14 days is factored in (to allow for the meeting to be arranged and for the decision to be communicated). See section 5 below.
- 2.4 Any subsequent appeals (formal procedure Stages II and III) must be submitted within 7 calendar days of the decision received from the previous stage. The Stage II process should be finished within 28 calendar days of the receipt of a complete Stage II appeal (see section 6.1). The Stage III process (appeal to the Office of the Provost) should be finished within 7 calendar days of the date of filing the Stage III appeal. See section 7 below.
- 2.5 Students wishing to appeal the issuance of an attendance failure (award of an FA grade) must normally do so within 7 calendar days of the final exam for the given course.
- 2.6 Students wishing to appeal a decision of the University Exam Board related to the final degree classification (or the recommendation for a final degree classification to the Open University) must do so, in writing, to Registry Services within three months of notification.
- 2.7 Students are reminded that all Open University grades are provisional until they are confirmed by the relevant examination board.
- 2.8 Students cannot normally appeal grades after they have been awarded the degree.

3. About the Academic Appeal and Grade Challenge Procedures

- 3.1 When a student indicates a grade challenge may be made, a link to the electronic copy of the Academic Appeals policy and procedures in the Portal <https://my.richmond.ac.uk/myacademics/default.aspx> will be provided to the student by the relevant School or Associate Dean. Hard copies are also available from Registry Services and can be downloaded from the Richmond University website (<http://www.richmond.ac.uk/student-life/student-complaints-and-appeals/>).
- 3.2 The informal and formal Academic Appeal and Grade Challenge procedures operate on the basis of the balance of probabilities, sometimes referred to as the preponderance of evidence. It is important for students, staff and faculty to remember that grade challenges and appeals are not considered as if they were 'criminal' cases to be proved 'beyond a reasonable doubt', but rather that a preponderance of the evidence simply means that one side has more evidence in its favour

than the other, even by the smallest degree, so that there is a higher probability of the truth of a disputed fact.

- 3.3 All documents and evidence submitted by a student in support of an appeal or grade challenge will be treated with respect for the privacy of the student, and will be confidential to those members of staff concerned with the matters raised in the challenge or appeal within Richmond University.
- 3.4 Further guidance and support on using the Academic Appeal and Grade Challenge policy and procedures can be obtained from the Office for Student Affairs, the Head of Registry Services, the Department of Academic Affairs and Quality Assurance, or the relevant Associate Dean. *Note that for the purposes of the delivery of the appeals policy, in the absence of Associate Deans at Richmond's additional locations, the Director of the RIASA Programme on the Leeds campus, and the Deans of the Rome and Florence campuses act as the Associate Deans do on the main Richmond campuses.*

4. Negotiating an Informal Resolution

- 4.1 The University aims to bring about an informal resolution of any grade challenge wherever possible and/or reasonable, and this procedure does not affect a student's right to insist on following the procedures laid out in this policy in full;
- 4.2 Any student 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.
- 4.3 A student who wishes to make a query relating to a request for re-evaluation of a grade (following on from steps in 4.2) should contact the instructor of the course within 7 days of the grade's issuance and ask for specific clarification on the issue concerned. If that instructor is no longer in the employ of Richmond University or is unavailable for other reasons, the student will meet with the relevant Associate Dean, or an alternative (Subject Leader, MA Convener) designated by the Associate Dean.
- 4.4 If the parties are able to reach an agreement about the dispute, they will write and sign a document showing the steps each party will take to resolve it where a grade has been changed, or where it has not, but this is accepted by the student (see section 1.3).
- 4.5 Copies of the email produced after a resolution agreed at step 4.4 will be distributed to the student and the instructor. A copy will also be sent to Registry Services so that the University can maintain an overview of cases.
- 4.6 The University expects that normally informal grade challenges will be resolved within 7 calendar days of the submission of a request for re-evaluation. If no resolution can be found, the student

may file a formal grade challenge in accordance with Stage I of the Academic Appeals and Grade Challenge Procedures, as described below.

5. Formal Procedure Stage I: The Grade Challenge

- 5.1 The student presents a written statement outlining the grounds for the grade challenge to the Associate Dean of the relevant School, or their designee, for consideration. This should be done within 21 calendar days of the grade release (and this time period should include the informal resolution stage);
- 5.2 The student's statement will be provided to the faculty member concerned;
- 5.3 The Associate Dean, or their designee, will review the information submitted and, where the case is straightforward, may make a decision that will resolve the case at this point. This will be provided in writing to all parties within 7 calendar days;
- 5.4 If the Associate Dean or designee believes a meeting of all parties is required, arrangements will be made to meet with the student and the faculty member within 7 calendar days of the receipt of the completed grade challenge from the student;
- 5.5 A student may be accompanied to the meeting by a supporter or a registered student of the University. The supporter may prompt or provide advice directly to the student, but may not address the group members unless invited to do so by the Associate Dean;
- 5.6 The Associate Dean, or a designee, will make a determination as to the merits of the grade challenge and attempt a resolution. He/she will prepare a written record of the meeting, and this will be provided to all parties, in writing, within 7 days of the meeting;
- 5.7 All documents and related correspondence are regarded as confidential and will only reside in Registry Services file if the grade challenge does not proceed to Stage II.

6. Formal Procedure Stage II: The Appeal

- 6.1 If the grade challenge is not resolved to the student's satisfaction, the student will indicate this in writing on an Academic Appeal form <http://www.richmond.ac.uk/student-life/student-complaints-and-appeals/> to the Chair of the Academic Appeals Committee (AAC) within 7 calendar days from the date of the Stage 1 meeting outcome (see 5.6). The form must be accompanied by the Associate Dean's response and any associated evidence if applicable. This begins Stage II.

- 6.2 At this point, the student, the instructor of the course, and the Associate Dean may provide additional supporting materials, and/or the Committee may request that additional materials are provided;
- 6.3 The Academic Appeals Committee (AAC) is a sub-committee of the Academic Board. Its membership comprises a senior member of academic staff (Chair), the Head of Registry Services, a representative from DAAQA, four members of faculty and student representation. Student representatives do not take part in appeal procedures relating to specific students;
- 6.4 The AAC secretary will make a determination on administrative grounds whether or not the case can proceed to the Committee. An appeal may be dismissed if there is no substantive case for the Committee to hear or if there is no valid remedy open to the Committee;
- 6.5 If a case is to be heard by the committee, a meeting will be scheduled within 14 calendar days of receipt of a complete appeal (see 6.1). The committee will normally expect to resolve a case at this meeting, and a decision notice will be sent to the student within 7 days;
- 6.6 In the event that a formally-instituted hearing is deemed to be necessary, this will be held within 21 calendar days of the receipt of a complete appeal. . At this hearing, the student 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;
- 6.7 A student may be accompanied to the meeting by a supporter. The supporter may prompt or provide advice to the student, but may not address the hearing committee unless invited to do so by the Chair;
- 6.8 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, faculty member, Associate Dean, and the Head of Registry Services, within 7 calendar days of the AAC hearing;
- 6.9 The Stage II process must be completed within 28 calendar days of the receipt of a complete Stage II appeal (see 6.1);
- 6.10 The outcomes of all appeals will be recorded in the reserved minutes of the AAC. The AAC makes an annual report of its activities to the Academic Board to assist the University in developing and improving its policies, procedures and conduct. Although the report will be anonymized, it is considered on the reserved agenda of Academic Board.

7. Formal Procedure Stage III: Further Appeal to the Office of the Provost

- 7.1 A student who chooses 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 the student lodge a further appeal;
- 7.2 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;
- 7.3 The grounds for a further appeal to the Provost are those provided in 1.9 above;
- 7.4 Further Appeal procedures are as follows:
 - a. The student must file a Further Appeal Form to the Office of the Provost requesting a review of AAC’s decision. This must be received within 7 calendar days of the AAC decision notice. The following material *must* accompany this form, or the Further Appeal will not be considered:
 - i. the original completed Academic Appeal form
 - ii. a copy of AAC’s decision,
 - iii. any new evidence
 - b. The material outlined above should be sufficient to provide the Provost with the basis for a decision, but additional information concerning the original appeal may be requested from the Chair of AAC if deemed necessary.
 - c. The Office of the Provost will make a final determination within 7 calendar days and the student will be informed of the outcome, in writing, in a formal Completion of Procedures letter from the University.
- 7.5 At this point the University’s institutional procedures for grade challenges and appeals have been completed. The Completion of Procedures letter will outline for the student the role of The Open University and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

8. Appeals and Complaints submitted to The Open University and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education

- 8.1 If, upon the conclusion the University’s institutional procedures the student is 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 Richmond, including the formal grade challenge and appeals procedures, before approaching the OIA.
- 8.2 Students undertaking The Open University validated awards have an opportunity to submit appeals to The Open University if they are dissatisfied with the conclusion reached through Richmond University’s procedures. Students must first have exhausted all appropriate internal procedures at

Richmond, including the formal grade challenge and appeals procedures, before approaching The Open University.

- 8.3 If, upon the conclusion of an appeal to The Open University, the student is dissatisfied with The Open University's decision, they may take their appeal to Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (<http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>).

See also the Regulations for Validated Awards of The Open University for Institutions Offering Dual Awards (<http://www.richmond.ac.uk/catalogues/>), Sections 31-34 "Academic Appeals and Complaints".

APPENDIX ONE: Recording, Reporting, Publicising and Learning from Grade Challenges and Appeals

Challenges and appeals provide the University with feedback which may be of use in identifying opportunities to improve services and facilities.

1. In line with the requirements of the OIA, Richmond University keeps a record of all challenges and appeals at the informal and formal stages, with a view to using the information to provide training and introduce improvements;
2. Challenges and appeals are recorded in sufficient and proportionate detail, and care is taken to ensure that a student is not identifiable;
3. There is an annual review and summary of complaints and appeals at the relevant Academic Board; the Academic Board produces a summary report for discussion at the University Board.
4. The Provost and Deputy Vice Chancellor serves as the University's point of contact with the OIA, but each School and department remains responsible for ensuring that appropriate records of complaints and appeals are maintained;
5. The University Executive and members of the University Board are reminded of the following from the *OIA Good Practice Framework* p.28:

Senior management should ensure that:

- the provider's final position on a complaint or academic appeal investigation is signed off by an appropriate person/officer in order to provide assurance that this is the definitive response of the provider and that the student's concerns have been taken seriously
- named individuals from the senior management maintain overall responsibility and accountability for the management and governance of concerns, complaints and academic appeals handling within the provider
- senior management has a clear understanding of, and role in, the complaints and academic appeals procedures (this will include an oversight role and will not necessarily mean being involved in the decision-making process)
- mechanisms are in place to ensure a consistent approach to the way information about handling concerns, complaints and academic appeals is managed, monitored, reviewed and reported at all levels in the provider
- concerns and complaints information is used to improve services to students and the student experience, and this is evident from regular publications
- complaints and academic appeals procedures meet the requirements of chapter B9 of the UK Quality Code

<http://www.oiahe.org.uk/media/96361/oia-good-practice-framework.pdf>