

Student Outcome Appeals Procedure

Summary

This is the Procedure for students to request a review of a student outcome in relation to assessment, progression or award.

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Related information	Student Outcome Appeals Regulations

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The University of Bristol is committed to providing a mechanism for a student to request consideration of a decision made by:
- For a taught student: an Exam Board that is responsible for making decisions about student assessment, progression or award.
 - For a Postgraduate Research (PGR) student: the Research Degrees Exam Board, a Dean in relation to a recommendation from a registration review panel or a progression board.

2. Scope

- 2.1. The Student Outcome Appeals Procedure (“Appeals Procedure”) applies to all registered students enrolled on a programme of study that leads to a formal award or credit-bearing unit, including those who have received a final award or a decision that they are required to withdraw.
- 2.2. If, during the consideration of an appeal, at any stage, either:
- A material irregularity in the original decision of the Exam Board is identified, or for a PGR student, the Exam Board, the Dean in relation to a registration review panel or progression board; or
 - Any ground in the appeal is upheld
- it will be referred back to the relevant academic body that made the original decision for consideration.
- 2.3. No appeal will be considered if it raises for the first time issues concerning the supervision or teaching of a student. Such matters will only be considered if they have been raised by the student promptly, at the time they first arose and pursued under the [Student Complaints Procedure](#).
- 2.4. There is no right of appeal under the Appeals Procedure in respect of a penalty or penalties imposed under the [Student Disciplinary Regulations](#) and implemented by the Exam Board on the direction of the Disciplinary Decision-Maker or a Disciplinary Committee.
- 2.5. No student shall be treated less favourably for bringing an appeal under this procedure.
- 2.6. Students studying at partner institutions should follow the appeals procedure at their home institution.

3. Definitions

- 3.1. **Day** refers to a calendar day in which the University is generally open and so includes weekends but does not include public holidays in England or University closure days as marked on the University's [website](#), unless otherwise stated.
- 3.2. **Dismissed** refers to an appeal being rejected at an early stage (e.g. initial assessment) because it does not meet certain criteria (e.g. no grounds, out of time).
- 3.3. **Material Irregularity** refers to a substantial error, omission, or deviation from regulation or procedure that affects a decision in a way that the outcome would have been different had the irregularity not occurred.
- 3.4. **Not Upheld** reflects that after full consideration, the original decision of the Exam Board (or, if relevant for a PGR student, the Dean or progression board) remains unchanged.
- 3.5. **Uphold the Appeal**: reflects that the appeal has been successful, either fully or partially. This means that there are sufficient grounds to support the original decision being reconsidered. While the appeal may be upheld, the final academic decision rests with the Exam Board (or, if relevant for a PGR student, the Dean or progression board). In some cases, this may mean that the outcome of the assessment or progression does not change, despite the appeal being upheld.

4. Support and Representation

- 4.1. A student considering submitting an appeal may seek advice from the [Students' Union Academic Advice Service](#) who offer free, non-judgemental, confidential support to all students.
- 4.2. Students can [book an appointment](#) with an adviser to discuss any difficulties they are experiencing whilst at university.
- 4.3. Students are expected to submit their own appeal. However, where a student is unable to do so without support, a third party may submit an appeal on their behalf only if acting as their designated representative and with the student's explicit written consent. Students may be supported, advised, or represented by a third party, such as the [Students' Union Academic Advice Service](#). The involvement of a representative should not delay the appeals process. Appeals are not legal proceedings, and legal representation is not normally necessary or expected.

5. Confidentiality

- 5.1. All information will be processed in accordance with the [Student Fair Processing Notice](#) and requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

- 5.2. Appeals will be handled with an appropriate level of confidentiality, with information shared only with those who need it for the purposes of investigating or responding to the appeal and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).
- 5.3. The outcomes and recommendations from appeals may be shared across the University, in an anonymised and aggregated format, for institutional learning and reporting purposes.

6. Reasonable Adjustments

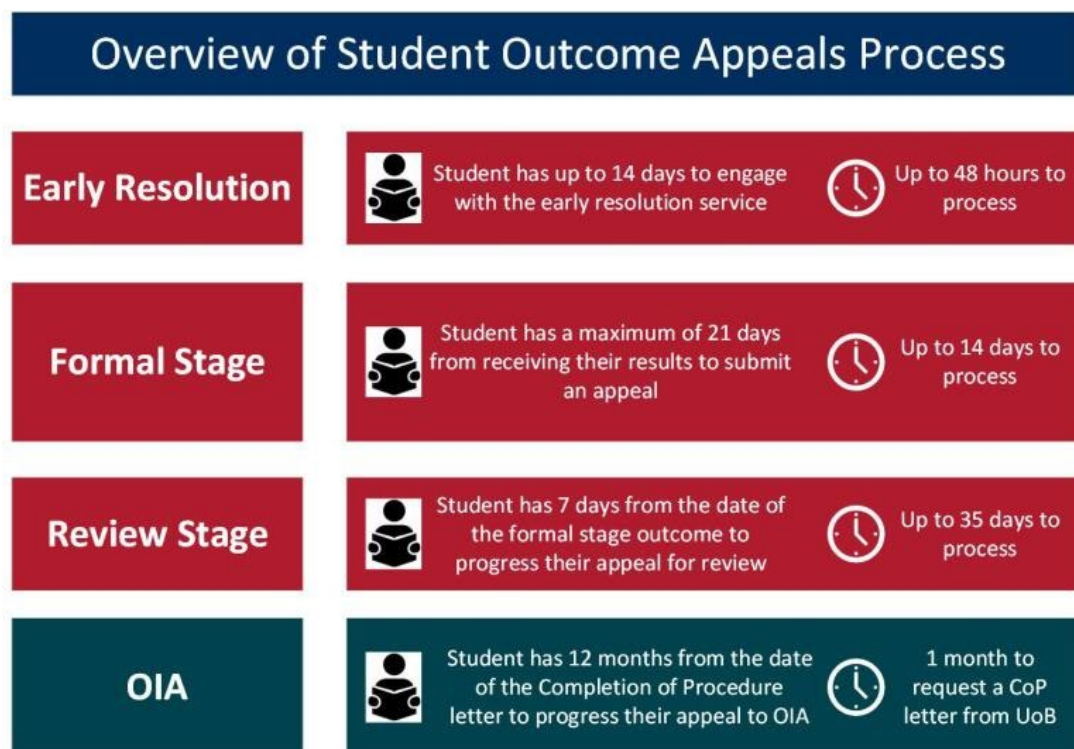
- 6.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, reasonable adjustments will be made to the Appeals Procedure to prevent any student from being at a substantial disadvantage because of a disability with any applicable adjustments in their Study Support Plan (SSP) applied.

7. Frivolous and Vexatious Appeals

- 7.1. The University expects students to engage with the appeals process in a constructive and respectful manner. Appeals that are considered frivolous or vexatious may not be accepted for consideration. Examples of such appeals include, but are not limited to:
- Using the appeal process as a means to harass or intimidate staff, including submissions that include aggressive or threatening language directed at staff.
 - Submitting multiple appeals on the same matter, even after the decision has been made and no new grounds or evidence are presented.
 - Persistently insisting on outcomes that lack reasonable support in the evidence, even after clear explanations and decisions have been communicated or that are not permissible under the Student Outcome Appeal Regulations.
- 7.2. The University may decline to consider an appeal if it considers it to be frivolous or vexatious and in these circumstances the student will receive a written explanation of the reasons. Where a student has made an appeal of this nature the University may consider taking action under the [Student Disciplinary Regulations](#).

8. Overview of Appeals Procedure

- 8.1. The Appeals Procedure is structured into four sequenced stages to ensure concerns are addressed in a fair, transparent and timely manner:



- **Early Resolution:** this initial stage is intended to resolve straightforward concerns promptly and without the need for a formal appeal.
- **Formal Stage:** if a student remains dissatisfied following Early Resolution, or if Early Resolution is not appropriate due to the complexity, seriousness, or nature of the case, the matter may proceed to the Formal Stage provided they have valid grounds (outlined in 12.1).
- **Review Stage:** if a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of the Formal Stage they may request a review of the process, provided they have valid grounds (outlined in 13.1). This final internal stage is a document-based review of the decision-making process. It does not involve reconsideration or reinvestigation of matters previously addressed. However, the review may involve limited inquiries into the handling of the Formal Stage to determine whether processes were properly followed. New grounds for appeal may not be introduced at this stage.
- **Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA):** where a student has completed the Appeals Procedure and remains dissatisfied with their outcome, they may submit a complaint to the OIA.

8.2. All staff who have access to, or consider, appeals will have received training for their role and how to apply the procedures outlined in this document.

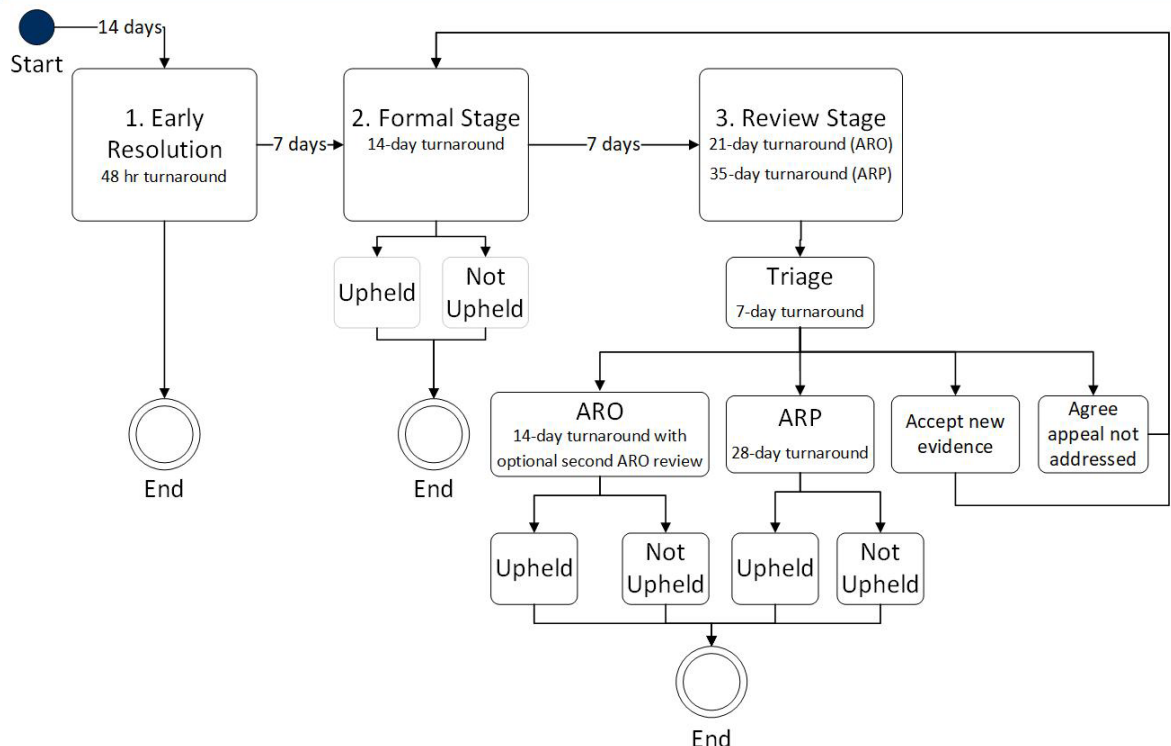
9. Evidence Requirements

- 9.1. The student has responsibility for providing all the evidence and information that they wish to be considered at the time of submission of the appeal. Further guidance on appropriate evidence requirements can be found [here](#).
- 9.2. The University is not able to contact third parties (e.g. doctors, police etc) to obtain evidence on behalf of a student.
- 9.3. Disabled students with a condition, impairment or learning difference covered by a Study Support Plan (SSP) are not required to submit additional medical or supporting evidence to re-establish the existence of their disability when submitting an appeal. The SSP constitutes the established evidence base for their disability. However, where the appeal is based on a worsening or acute episode of their condition, students are expected to provide evidence of the impact and timing of the change in circumstances.
- 9.4. In cases where it is not possible to present evidence with an appeal, an explanation of why the evidence has not been included, with an indication of when it will be provided should be included in the appeal form.
- 9.5. Consideration as to whether it is appropriate to allow additional time to provide outstanding evidence will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
- 9.6. Should the person reviewing the appeal have cause to suspect that the documentary evidence provided with the appeal has been falsified, they will refer the case to the [Student Disciplinary Regulations](#) for consideration. The appeal may be paused, or the appeal outcome withheld until the matter has been resolved.

10. Timelines

- 10.1. This Appeals Procedure outlines timescales which apply to both the University and the student.
- 10.2. In exceptional circumstances, the University may permit a student to make a Formal Stage without having accessed Early Resolution or consider a request to submit an appeal at either the Formal or Review Stage outside of published time limits. Students must provide a clear explanation and supporting evidence demonstrating why they are unable to meet the deadline.
- 10.3. If an appeal is not submitted within the permitted time limit, and no new deadline has been agreed, the appeal will be closed and no further consideration will be given.
- 10.4. The University endeavours to respond within the timeframes that are outlined. There will occasionally be circumstances when, for good reason, the University will need to extend the timeframe. When this occurs, the University will inform the student and provide regular progress updates.

Overview of Student Outcome Appeals Stages & Outcomes



11. Early Resolution

- 11.1. Students should first raise any concerns within **14 days**. The timeframe starts the day after a student has received notification of their results.
- 11.2. This initial stage is intended to resolve straightforward concerns promptly and without the need for a formal appeal.
- 11.3. Early Resolution provides an opportunity for students to raise concerns with an appropriate member of staff and receive a prompt response, either at the time of contact or within 48 hours. Possible outcomes of Early Resolution may include:
 - clarification of a decision or process;
 - confirmation that marks have been calculated and recorded correctly;
 - identification of administrative errors or procedural irregularities;
 - provision of additional information or explanation regarding student assessment, progression or award outcomes;
 - confirmation of the consideration of exceptional circumstances;
 - guidance on the next steps, including how to submit an appeal at the Formal Stage, if necessary.

- 11.4. Students will not be required to submit an appeal form to access Early Resolution. The University may ask students to summarise or clarify the key parts of their concern in writing if it is unclear.
- 11.5. Students will not normally be asked to provide significant evidence during Early Resolution. If the matter cannot be resolved without gathering extensive evidence, students will usually be advised to submit an appeal for consideration at the Formal Stage.
- 11.6. If a student remains dissatisfied following Early Resolution, they can formally request a decision is considered by submitting an appeal form.

12. Formal Stage

Grounds of Appeal

- 12.1. Formal Stage appeals are only permitted on one or more of the following grounds:
 - 1. There has been a **material irregularity** in the decision-making process sufficient to require the decision to be reconsidered;
 - 2. A student's performance in assessment has been **affected by illness** or other factors which the student was **unable**, for good reason, **to disclose** before the deadline prior to the Exam Board or, for a PGR student, to the examiners before the oral examination;
 - 3. A penalty for academic misconduct was **disproportionate** or **not permitted** under the regulations.
- 12.2. Examples of a material irregularity include:
 - a. the assessment and subsequent decision-making process were not conducted in accordance with the relevant regulations;
 - b. an adverse decision has been taken because of an administrative error;
 - c. the student has not been given the opportunity to draw relevant matters to the attention of the Exam Board or, for a PGR student, to the examiners of the oral examination;
 - d. the consideration of illness or other exceptional circumstances, known to the Exam Board or, for a PGR student, known to the examiners, was not conducted in accordance with the relevant regulations.

Appeal Submission

- 12.3. To start the Formal Stage, the student must complete the appeal form and submit it within **21 days**. The timeframe starts the day after a student has received notification of their results.

Initial Assessment

- 12.4. Upon receipt of an appeal form, an initial assessment will be undertaken to check that it has been made under the right procedure, within the deadline, in the required format and on one or more of the valid grounds for appeal. Disagreement with the academic judgment of the Exam Board will not constitute a valid ground for appeal.
- 12.5. Where a student does not engage with Early Resolution before progressing to Formal Stage, they should set out the reason for not seeking to resolve their issues and concerns at the initial stage. If, upon initial review, the University considers that the matter is appropriate for Early Resolution, it may refer the case back to that stage to explore whether an outcome can be achieved.

Appeal Outcomes

- 12.6. Following consideration of an appeal at the Formal Stage, the following outcomes are possible:
- **Dismiss** the appeal following initial assessment giving reasons and issuing a **Completion of Procedures** letter.
 - **Not Upheld** with the relevant reasons outlined. The original decision made by an Exam Board (or, if relevant for a PGR student, the Dean or progression board) stands.
 - **Uphold the appeal:** either completely or in part. If related to a taught student, the case is referred to the relevant Exam Board or initially to the Exceptional Circumstances Committee in cases where an exceptional circumstances classification may be applicable. If related to a PGR student, the case is referred to the Research Degrees Exam Board, the Dean or the progression board. These bodies will determine the most appropriate course of action in line with institutional policies.
- Note: while the appeal may be upheld, the final academic decision rests with the Exam Board (or, if relevant for a PGR student, or the Dean or progression board). In some cases, this may mean that the outcome of the assessment or progression does not change, despite the appeal being upheld.*
- 12.7. Reasons for an appeal being upheld at the Formal Stage may include:
- **Correction of Material Irregularity:** Rectifying identified errors to align decision-making with academic regulations.
 - **Consideration of Exceptional Circumstances:** Review of previously undisclosed circumstances, potentially leading to a reconsideration of the original decision.

Review of Penalty: Review of the penalty imposed where there is an absence of a clear rationale or where material errors may have occurred, to ensure the decision is compliant with academic regulations.

- 12.8. For all outcomes, the decision will be communicated within 14 days of the completed appeal form and all relevant evidence being submitted.

13. Review Stage

Grounds of Appeal

- 13.1. An appeal is only permitted to progress to the Review Stage where a student can demonstrate that one or more of the following grounds apply:
1. **New supporting evidence** is available that could make a difference to the outcome and which the student was unable, for good reason, to disclose at the time of the Formal Stage;
 2. There has been a **material irregularity** in the Formal Stage decision sufficient to require reconsideration.

Appeal Submission

- 13.2. To progress to the Review Stage, a student must make a request within 7 days of the Formal Stage outcome.

Initial Assessment

- 13.3. Upon receipt of a request for review, an initial assessment will be undertaken to check that it has been made under the right procedure, within the deadline, in the required format and on one or more of the valid grounds for review.
- 13.4. An appeal will only be allowed to progress to the Review Stage once the Formal Stage has concluded. A student will not be permitted to progress to the Review Stage if:
- a. all academic outcomes requested have been granted;
 - b. those requested but not granted are not permissible under the regulations;
 - c. those requested but not granted would not alter the student's academic outcome, classification or award.

Review Stage Outcomes

- 13.5. After consideration of the review request, the following outcomes are possible:
- **Dismiss** the Appeal following initial assessment, giving reasons and issuing a **Completion of Procedures** letter.

- **Referral back to the Formal Stage for reconsideration:** where new evidence is accepted and/or agreement that the appeal grounds have not been appropriately considered. The reconsidered Formal Stage decision will be communicated within 21 days of the appeal being referred to Review Stage.
- **Referral to an Appeal Review Officer (ARO):** An independent document-based review of the decision-making process shall be undertaken by a member of staff from a pool of trained decision-makers who has no prior involvement with the appealable decision or the Formal Stage. It will not involve a hearing but may require additional information from the student, school or faculty which must be provided promptly.

The decision will be communicated within 21 days of referral to an ARO. If the ARO:

- a. **Does not uphold an appeal,** the original decision by the Exam Board or, if relevant for a PGR student, the Dean or progression board stands and reasons for this are outlined.
 - b. **Upholds the appeal** in full or in part. If related to a taught student, the case is referred to the relevant Exam Board, or initially to the Exceptional Circumstances Committee in cases where an exceptional circumstance classification may be applicable. If related to a PGR student, the case is referred to the Research Degrees Exam Board, the Dean or progression board. These bodies will review the circumstances and determine the most appropriate course of action in line with institutional policies.
- **Referral to an Appeal Review Panel (ARP):** An independent review of the decision-making process shall be undertaken by a panel of three members of staff from a pool of trained decision-makers who have no prior involvement with the appealable decision or the Formal Stage. It will not involve a hearing but may require additional information from the student, school or faculty which must be provided promptly.

The decision will be communicated within 35 days of referral to an ARP. If the ARP:

- a. **Does not uphold an appeal,** the original decision by the Exam Board stands and reasons for this are outlined.
- a. **Upholds the appeal** in full or in part. If related to a taught student, the case is referred to the relevant Exam Board, or initially to the Exceptional Circumstances Committee in cases where an exceptional circumstance classification may be applicable. If related to a PGR student, the case is referred to the Research Degrees Exam Board, the Dean or the progression board. These bodies will review the circumstances and determine the most appropriate course of action in line with institutional policies.

13.6. Reasons for an appeal being upheld at the Review Stage may include:

- **Correction of Material Irregularity:** Rectifying identified errors to align decision-making with academic regulations.
- **Consideration of Exceptional Circumstances:** Review of previously undisclosed circumstances, potentially leading to a reconsideration of the original decision.
- **Review of Penalty:** Review of the penalty imposed where there is an absence of a clear rationale or where material errors may have occurred, to ensure the decision is compliant with academic regulations.

14. Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA)

- 14.1. The OIA provides an independent scheme for the review of student complaints. The OIA will only consider cases when the University's internal procedures have been exhausted. It will not intervene in matters which turn purely on academic judgment.
- 14.2. At the end of the appeal process, if the appeal is not upheld, the student will be issued with a Completion of Procedures letter.
- 14.3. If an appeal is upheld (fully or partially), a Completion of Procedures letter is not issued automatically. Students can request a letter within one month of the outcome if required.
- 14.4. Following receipt of the Completion of Procedures letter the student is entitled to submit a complaint to the OIA (oiahe.org.uk).

15. Reporting Processes

- 15.1. On an annual basis, analysis of the Appeals Procedure will be undertaken to provide oversight and assure compliance, consistency and fairness. This will be reported to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee where areas of good practice will be highlighted and recommendations to address areas for improvement that have been identified.