

## Appeals Policy

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## Introduction

International College of Contemporary Sciences ICCS is committed to ensuring that assessment decisions are fair, transparent and consistent and that they are reached in accordance with approved regulations and procedures. The college recognises, however, that there may be occasions when a student believes that a decision has not been made correctly or that a procedural irregularity, bias or other significant factor has affected the outcome. In such circumstances it is important that students have access to a clear and fair mechanism through which they can request that the decision be reviewed.

This Appeals Policy sets out the framework through which students may challenge certain academic and assessment related decisions. It defines what is meant by an appeal, explains the grounds on which an appeal may be brought and distinguishes appeals from complaints and from challenges to academic judgement. The policy also describes the stages of the process, the roles and responsibilities of those involved and the safeguards that ensure appeals are considered impartially and within appropriate timescales. It forms part of the ICCS quality assurance arrangements and should be read alongside the Assessment and Academic Misconduct Policy, the Complaints Policy and Procedures and the Reasonable Adjustment and Special Consideration Policy.

## Purpose and Aims

The purpose of this policy is to provide a structured and transparent route by which students can ask ICCS to review certain decisions relating to assessment, progression and awards where they believe that an error has been made or that published procedures have not been followed. The policy is designed to protect students from unfair treatment while maintaining the authority of properly exercised academic judgement and the integrity of the college awards. It seeks to give students confidence that legitimate concerns will be heard and considered without prejudice and that outcomes will be communicated clearly and respectfully.

The specific aims of the policy are to ensure that appeals are handled consistently and efficiently, to promote early resolution where possible, and to ensure that learning from appeals contributes to the enhancement of assessment and quality assurance practices. The policy aims to support staff by clarifying expectations and procedures, thereby reducing uncertainty and inconsistency, and to support external stakeholders, including awarding organisations and regulators, by demonstrating that ICCS has robust mechanisms for addressing potential errors and safeguarding academic standards. It

also aims to encourage students to engage responsibly with the process and to understand the distinction between disagreement with a mark and a valid ground for appeal.

## **Regulatory and Sector Context**

ICCS operates this Appeals Policy within a broader framework of United Kingdom legislation and regulation governing higher and further education. The college has regard to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, particularly in relation to avoiding discrimination and providing reasonable adjustments for disabled students engaged in the appeals process. It also considers obligations under consumer protection law, including the Consumer Rights Act 2015 and related guidance from the Competition and Markets Authority, which emphasise the need for fair, honest and transparent processes in dealing with academic matters that have contractual implications for students as consumers.

In addition, ICCS takes account of the expectations of the Office for Students and of relevant awarding organisations, including any specific requirements relating to appeals against assessment decisions and the maintenance of academic standards. Where applicable, the college also considers good practice guidance issued by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, which outlines principles for fair, accessible and timely student complaints and appeals procedures. This policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure that it remains aligned with developments in legislation, regulation and sector good practice.

## **Definitions and Key Concepts**

For the purposes of this policy an academic appeal is defined as a request by a student for a review of a decision made by an academic body, such as an assessment board or progression panel, in relation to assessment results, progression, classification or eligibility for an award. An appeal is not a second opportunity to challenge academic judgement or to re mark work simply because the student is dissatisfied with the outcome. Rather, it focuses on whether the decision was reached in accordance with approved regulations, procedures and evidence, and whether any material circumstances were not properly taken into account.

The policy distinguishes appeals from complaints, which are expressions of dissatisfaction about the quality or delivery of teaching, supervision or services, or about the behaviour of staff or other students. Complaints are normally addressed under the ICCS Complaints Policy and Procedures. The policy also makes a distinction between academic judgement, which relates to decisions made by subject experts about the

academic merit of work or the appropriateness of assessment methods, and procedural or factual matters, which can be reviewed by another person or body. Appeals cannot normally be made against academic judgement itself, but may be made where there is evidence that judgement was not properly exercised because of procedural error or other valid grounds.

## Scope

This policy applies to appeals made by students who are registered on programmes delivered or assessed by ICCS, including those offered in collaboration with partner institutions where ICCS has responsibility for assessment decisions, and to applicants where a specific appeals mechanism is provided in relation to admissions decisions. It covers decisions relating to module or unit results, progression from one stage or level to another, the requirement to withdraw on academic grounds, eligibility for and classification of awards and other academic decisions specified in programme regulations or student handbooks. The policy applies regardless of mode of study, including full time, part time, blended and distance learning.

Appeals relating to qualifications or assessments that are wholly controlled by external awarding organisations may be subject to those organisations regulations and procedures. In such cases ICCS will advise students of the appropriate process and, where possible, support them in making an appeal under the relevant external arrangements. This policy does not normally apply to matters such as complaints about service quality, allegations of academic misconduct, or challenges to admissions decisions other than as explicitly provided for in admissions procedures, although there may be links between these areas that ICCS will consider carefully in coordination with other policies.

## Principles

The operation of this Appeals Policy is guided by principles of fairness, transparency and proportionality. Appeals will be considered without bias and with an open mind, and all parties will be given a reasonable opportunity to present relevant information and respond to points raised. Decisions will be made by individuals or panels who have not been directly involved in the original decision, wherever practicable, and who have appropriate expertise and authority. Processes and outcomes will be explained clearly, and reasons will be given where appeals are not upheld, so that students can understand how conclusions were reached.

The policy also operates on the principle that appeals should be resolved as quickly as reasonably possible, consistent with the need for thorough consideration. Time limits are

set for each stage, and students are expected to submit appeals promptly and to engage constructively with any requests for further information. ICCS will ensure that students are not disadvantaged for bringing an appeal in good faith and that reasonable adjustments are made for disabled students or those with particular communication needs. Confidentiality will be respected, with information shared only where necessary for the proper handling of the appeal or to meet legal and regulatory obligations.

## **Grounds for Appeal**

An appeal will normally only be considered where the student can demonstrate one or more recognised grounds. These may include evidence that there has been a material procedural irregularity in the conduct of assessment or in the application of regulations, such as an error in calculation of marks, failure to apply a published assessment rule, or significant deviation from agreed assessment arrangements without good reason. Another ground may be the emergence of new, material evidence relating to extenuating circumstances that, for good reason, could not reasonably have been presented at the time of the original decision, for example where a serious illness has only recently been diagnosed or documented.

A further possible ground is that there is evidence of bias or reasonable perception of bias, or that the decision reached is manifestly unreasonable in the light of the evidence available. Disagreement with the academic judgement of examiners or markers about the quality of work or the appropriateness of marks does not, in itself, constitute a valid ground for appeal. Students are expected to identify clearly which grounds they are relying on and to provide as much relevant detail and supporting evidence as possible. ICCS will provide guidance and examples to help students understand the difference between valid and invalid grounds.

## **Stages of the Appeals Procedure**

The ICCS appeals procedure normally comprises a number of stages, designed to ensure that issues can be explored and, where possible, resolved without the need for escalation, while also providing a route for more formal review. In some cases students may initially seek clarification or informal discussion with an appropriate member of staff, such as a module leader or programme leader, in order to understand the basis of a decision. This may resolve misunderstandings or identify simple errors that can be corrected quickly. However, informal discussion does not replace the formal appeals process and does not extend the time limit for submitting a formal appeal.

Where a student wishes to proceed with a formal appeal they must submit a written statement within the published timeframe, using the relevant ICCS form where provided.

The appeal will be acknowledged and an initial review will be undertaken to determine whether it falls within the scope of the policy and whether the stated grounds are potentially valid. Appeals that pass this screening stage will normally be investigated by a designated officer or considered by an appeals panel, depending on the nature and seriousness of the issues raised. The student may be invited to a meeting, which may take place in person or online, and may be accompanied in accordance with ICCS regulations. A written outcome, setting out the decision and reasons, will be provided. Where applicable, students will be informed of any further internal review stage and of any relevant external routes, such as the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, once internal procedures are exhausted.

### **Evidence, Time Limits and Representation**

Students are responsible for ensuring that appeals are submitted within the time limits specified in ICCS regulations, which are designed to balance the need for timely resolution with recognition that students may require a short period to gather information and support. Late appeals will not normally be accepted unless there is compelling evidence of good reason for the delay, such as serious illness or other circumstances beyond the student control. Appeals must set out clearly the decision being challenged, the grounds for appeal, the key facts and dates, and the remedy sought, and should be accompanied by relevant documentary evidence where available.

ICCS recognises that engaging with an appeals process can be stressful and that some students may benefit from support. Students may therefore be accompanied at meetings by a friend, another student, a representative of a students union or other permitted supporter, in line with ICCS procedures, although legal representation is not usually necessary or appropriate for internal processes. Staff considering appeals may request additional information or clarification where needed and may seek advice from specialist colleagues, such as quality assurance or student support services, to ensure that decisions are well informed and consistent with policy and regulation.

### **Relationship with Other Procedures**

Appeals may sometimes overlap with, or arise alongside, other procedures, such as complaints about teaching or supervision, allegations of academic misconduct, or requests for reasonable adjustment or special consideration. ICCS will consider carefully how best to manage such situations to avoid duplication, inconsistency or confusion. In some cases it may be appropriate to pause an appeal pending the outcome of another process that is directly relevant, for example where the appeal depends on the outcome of an investigation into alleged administrative error or misconduct.



Where issues fall clearly within the remit of another policy, students will be signposted to the appropriate process and supported to access it where necessary. Information obtained in one process may, with appropriate safeguards and consent where required, be used to inform another, in order to minimise the need for students to repeat their account. ICCS will make clear to students how different procedures interact, which decisions can be reviewed under which process, and what the possible outcomes of each process may be. The college will strive to coordinate related procedures so that they are as streamlined and comprehensible as possible.

## **Confidentiality, Data Protection and Records**

Information submitted in connection with an appeal will be treated as confidential and will be shared only with those who need it in order to consider and respond to the issues raised, or where ICCS is required to share information by law or regulation. The college will handle personal data in accordance with data protection legislation and its own data protection and records management policies, ensuring that information is stored securely and retained only for as long as is necessary for the purposes of the appeal, for audit and quality assurance, and for any reporting obligations to awarding organisations or regulators.

Records of appeals, including the grounds raised, evidence considered and outcomes reached, will be maintained in a way that protects individual privacy while enabling ICCS to monitor patterns and trends, identify recurring issues and improve systems and practice. Students have the right to request access to personal data held about them, subject to legal exemptions, and will be informed about how to exercise this right. Aggregated and anonymised information about appeals may be reported to relevant committees and used to inform staff development, policy review and risk management processes.

## **Vexatious or Misconceived Appeals**

ICCS expects that students will use the appeals process responsibly and in good faith. The college will not normally progress appeals that are manifestly frivolous, malicious, vexatious or wholly without substance, or where the behaviour of the appellant is abusive or unreasonably persistent. Examples may include repeated appeals about the same decision without new evidence, attempts to use the process to pursue matters unrelated to academic decisions, or the use of offensive or threatening language towards staff involved in the process. In such cases ICCS may decide to reject the appeal at an early stage and to restrict further correspondence on the matter.

Where misuse of the appeals process is serious or persistent, it may itself be treated as misconduct under the relevant student disciplinary procedures. ICCS will, however, distinguish clearly between vexatious behaviour and genuine distress or dissatisfaction, and will remain open to identifying legitimate issues of concern even where the manner of presentation is challenging. The college will ensure that decisions to treat an appeal as vexatious are taken at an appropriately senior level, are documented with reasons, and do not prevent consideration of future appeals that raise genuinely new and substantive issues.

### **Monitoring, Evaluation and Review of this Policy**

The operation of this Appeals Policy will be monitored through regular analysis of data on the number, type and outcomes of appeals, the time taken to resolve them and any patterns that may indicate underlying issues in assessment processes or communication. Qualitative feedback from students and staff involved in appeals will also be considered, along with findings from internal audits, external examiner reports and external reviews by awarding or regulatory bodies. This information will be reported to relevant academic and governance committees and will inform action planning aimed at enhancing the fairness, consistency and efficiency of assessment and decision making.

This policy will normally be reviewed at least every two years, or sooner if required by changes in legislation, regulation or sector guidance, or if monitoring highlights significant issues that warrant earlier revision. Revisions will be developed in consultation with students, staff and other stakeholders as appropriate and will be approved through established ICCS governance processes. The aim of review and monitoring is to ensure that the appeals framework remains robust, accessible and aligned with ICCS strategic objectives and values, and continues to support the rights and responsibilities of students and the integrity of the college awards.

### **References**

- Equality Act 2010, in relation to fair treatment and reasonable adjustments.
- Consumer Rights Act 2015 and Competition and Markets Authority guidance on students as consumers.
- Office for Students regulatory framework and associated conditions relating to quality, standards and consumer protection.
- Office of the Independent Adjudicator Good Practice Framework for handling complaints and academic appeals, where applicable.



- Ofqual General Conditions of Recognition and relevant awarding organisation regulations for appeals.
- Guidance issued by the Department for Education and other sector bodies on academic appeals and student protection.

