Academic Appeals Procedure

What is an academic appeal?

An academic appeal is defined as “a request for a review of a decision of an academic body charged with making decisions on student progress, assessment and awards.”

An academic appeal relates to the outcome of an assessment, or a student’s progression, and may be based on:

- a procedural irregularity in the assessment process
- bias or perception of bias
- extenuating circumstances where, for good reason, the academic body was not made aware of a significant factor relating to the assessment of a student when it made its original decision

The following are not normally considered to be legitimate grounds for an academic appeal:

- where a student questions the exercise of academic judgement, that is, the decision made by academic staff on the quality of the work itself or the criteria being applied to mark the work (rather than the administrative marking process)
- where there is disagreement about the way extenuating or mitigating circumstances were considered, unless there is clear evidence that the defined procedures were not followed by the extenuating or mitigating circumstances panel and/or the extenuating or mitigating circumstances panel’s recommendation was not properly considered by an academic body.

Where issues raised need to be considered under several processes, FIPC SCITT Director will tell the student which specific issues will be considered under which specific procedure.

Who can submit an academic appeal?

This procedure is designed to be used by students registered on the FIPC postgraduate ITT programmes. Former students are included and are able to raise issues of complaint within 90 days of their graduation.

Usually students will submit an academic appeal themselves. If they are unable or reluctant to do this without support, then they may be supported by a third party, for example a union advisor. Due care will be taken to comply with data protection legislation when dealing with a third party.

Early resolution

Academic appeals may not be readily amenable to early resolution because of the sovereignty of academic judgement.

If concerns are raised with another member of staff, this member of staff should refer the complaint to the FIPC SCITT Director. The student raising the concern should understand that this is the procedure.

FIPC SCITT gives students an opportunity to seek clarification of academic assessments. Concerns can be discussed with the director of the FIPC SCITT. The purpose of this is to provide an opportunity to manage the student's expectations before he or she decides whether to submit a formal appeal. Students should make contact and seek a face-to-face discussion, so that, if possible, concerns can be resolved swiftly.

Where proportionate, the student should be provided with a written outcome.

Where it is clear early resolution is not appropriate or possible, and that a concern will need to proceed immediately to the formal stage, the student will be directed promptly to the relevant procedure.

The FIPC SCITT Director will write a short report, detailing the nature of the academic appeal, a brief outline of the discussion, the decision reached and any agreed actions.

The FIPC SCITT Deputy Director will keep a record of the report, maintaining any agreed confidentiality. The Strategic Group will have access to this record only in the case of closed complaints.

This stage will take no longer than 2 weeks from initial contact. If this period includes school holiday time, the student submitting the academic appeal may allow it to be extended.

The Formal Stage

This is used when a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of Early Resolution, or where Early Resolution is not possible or appropriate (as in the case of complex issues).

The student should complete the appropriate form setting out clearly the grounds for the appeal, evidence in support of the claim, what outcome is hoped for, and if mediation or any further support is required.

The completed form should be emailed to the director of the FIPC SCITT. The FIPC SCITT Director will appoint a member of the West Essex SCITT Strategic Group to manage this stage. Contact details can be obtained from the FIPC SCITT Manager. This is day 1 of the process.

Academic appeals that require swift action need to be identified immediately. These may include, but are not limited to, cases where the impact of the issues raised has detrimental consequences for the student's mental health or where the student displays significant distress and cases where external time limits apply.

An email confirming receipt will be sent to the student submitting the appeal by day 2 if swift action is required and by day 7 for other cases.

A bespoke timeline will be agreed in consultation with the student submitting the academic appeal by day 5 if swift action is required.

The member of staff considering the appeal (the investigating officer) may talk to key staff and consider documents and other evidence. He or she must determine if there are grounds for an appeal.

If there are not grounds for an academic appeal, this will be explained to the student in a face to face meeting. A written notification will follow this meeting.

If there are grounds for an academic appeal, the matter will be referred to an appeals panel comprising two members of the FIPC SCITT Strategic Group and one member not directly involved with FIPC SCITT. The investigating officer and the panel must have no previous involvement in the matter.

The investigating officer and the panel will be appointed by the director of FIPC SCITT.

The investigating officer will produce a report by day 28. The report will outline the process followed, the information gathered, the conclusions drawn and any recommendations. The student or their representative will receive copies of the information gathered and the investigation report.

The report will be submitted to the panel for consideration of the academic appeal at a hearing. The student will be informed of their right to attend, how to access advice and support, and of their right to be accompanied, for example by a friend or union representative, and their right to submit evidence and/or call witnesses. They will be notified by day 35 of the date of the hearing.

The hearing will be around day 56.

The student should be provided with information about the composition of the panel and others who may attend to give evidence. A copy of the information to be considered should be provided in advance.

Notes should be taken at the hearing, setting out attendance, a brief outline of the proceedings and the reasons for the decisions taken.

The student will receive a written outcome by email by day 60 for ordinary action. This notification will also give information about the student's right to take the appeal to the review stage, the grounds for doing this, the time limits for this, the appropriate procedure and where to access advice and support.

If the academic appeal is upheld, the written outcome will explain how and when any remedy will be implemented.

If the academic appeal is upheld, FIPC SCITT will close the matter and notify the student.

If a student doesn't take the academic appeal to the review stage within the time limit for doing so, FIPC SCITT will close the matter and notify the student.

Records will be kept by FIPC SCITT Course Manager of all documentation on both open and closed cases. Open cases may only be seen by staff members involved in the case so far.

The Review Stage

If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome of the formal stage, he or she can request a review within 14 days of notification of the outcome of the formal stage. This should be done by email, submitting the appropriate form.

The grounds for requesting a review include:

- a review of the procedures followed
- a consideration of whether the outcome was reasonable
- new material evidence which the student was unable, for valid reasons, to provide earlier in the process.

The review stage will not involve a further investigation.

This review will be carried out by one of the members of the Strategic Group who has had no previous involvement in the matter and will be appointed by the FIPC SCITT Director.

The reviewer will either uphold the formal stage decision, refer the complaint back to the formal stage or uphold the complaint, and will notify the student within 16 days of the review being requested.

If the matter is to be referred back, this decision will be communicated to the student, clearly explaining the reasons for this in straightforward language. A different investigating officer and panel will be appointed by the FIC SCITT Director or the FIPC SCITT Deputy Director, and the process will restart.

If the complaint is not upheld by the outcome of the review stage, the student will receive a Completion of Procedures letter. This will include a clear explanation and outline the reasons for this decision in straightforward language.

This notification will also include information about their right to pursue the matter further by submitting a complaint to the OIA, the time limit for doing so and where and how to access advice and support.

If the complaint is upheld, the Completion of Procedures letter will explain how and when any remedy will be implemented.

Independent External Review (OIA)

Once the review stage has been completed, the student is entitled to ask the OIA, the independent ombudsman of last resort, to review his or her complaint about the outcome of FIPC SCITT's Academic Appeals process. The complaint should normally be submitted to the OIA within 12 months of the date of the Completion of Procedures Letter.

Frivolous or vexatious academic appeals

FIPC SCITT will terminate consideration of an academic appeal if it considers it to be frivolous or vexatious. Examples of such academic appeals include:

- Academic appeals which are obsessive, harassing or repetitive
- Insistence on pursuing non-meritorious academic appeals and/or unrealistic, unreasonable outcomes
- Insistence on pursuing meritorious academic appeals in an unreasonable manner
- Academic appeals which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance
- Demands for redress which lack any serious purpose or value

In such instances, FIPC SCITT will write to the student explaining why it is terminating consideration of the matter.

The student will be provided with details of how to appeal against the decision.

Appeals against such decisions should be emailed to the FIPC SCITT Director who will appoint a member of the FIPC SCITT Strategic Group, with no previous involvement in the matter, to review as per the review stage.

Recording, reporting, publicising and learning from academic appeals

Valuable feedback is obtained through the consideration and resolution of academic concerns and appeals as opportunities to improve provision of services and academic decision-making are identified. All academic concerns and appeals will be recorded at all stages. This data can be used for analysis and management reporting.

Academic concerns and appeals should be recorded in sufficient, proportionate detail. Student details will be anonymised and care taken to ensure that a student is not identifiable.

By recording and using information in this way, the causes of academic concerns and appeals can be identified, addressed and, where appropriate, training opportunities can be identified and improvements introduced.

Recording procedures should facilitate:

- Using data to identify the root cause of academic appeals
- Taking action to reduce the chance of problems re-occurring
- Recording the details of corrective action in the academic concerns and appeals file
- Systematically reviewing academic concerns and appeals performance reports to improve performance

The analysis of management reports detailing academic concerns and appeals will help to ensure that any trends or wider issues which may not be obvious from individual academic concerns and appeals are quickly identified and addressed.

Reports should be provided to the FIPC SCITT Strategic Group.

Academic Appeals

Early Resolution Guidance

This is a local, informal process which is capable of resolving student concerns before they escalate into formal academic appeals.

The following are some effective ways of dealing with routine student concerns about academic awards:

- checking that the assessments and grades awarded are correctly recorded and communicated to the student
- providing explanations about how assessments and grades are awarded and moderated
- managing expectations about possible outcomes
- being empathetic and understanding when there is no apparent solution

Questions to consider in attempting early resolution of concerns might include:

- What specifically is the concern about and which areas of FIPC SCITT and/or the course are involved?
- What outcome is the student hoping for and can it be achieved?
- Is the concern straightforward and likely to be resolved with little or no investigation?
- Can it be resolved on the spot by providing, where appropriate, an explanation, an alternative solution or an apology?
- Can someone else assist in seeking resolution, for example where an informal administrative resolution is required?
- Is there merit in using confidential mediation or conciliation?
- What assistance or support can be provided to the student in taking this forward?

Important points to consider are:

- Students should be able to air their concerns and feel that they have been listened to.
- Staff should be prepared to offer a verbal apology if appropriate. An apology does not create any legal liability.
- If the issue lies in a staff member's area of work, every attempt should be made to resolve the concern at source in consultation with the student.
- If the issue lies elsewhere, the staff member should liaise with the relevant area to facilitate swift resolution, rather than referring the student to a different person or office.
- If early resolution is not appropriate or possible, explain the formal procedure to the student, describing the timeline and directing them to the forms.

Academic Appeals

Formal Academic Appeal Submission Form

What are the grounds for the appeal? FIPC permits academic appeals on the grounds listed here. Please tick which apply and add brief details as necessary.	1. Procedural irregularity in the assessment process 2. Mitigating circumstances which were not (for good reason) made known to the assessors. 3. Bias in the assessment process
What evidence is to be provided?	
Did you attempt early resolution? Who was involved?	
How would you like the concern to be resolved?	
Do you think a mediator would be useful?	
Do you require any further support or information?	
Is there anything else you would like to add?	

Please be assured that FIPC SCITT take your concerns seriously and will make every effort to reach a fair resolution.

Please email this form to the FIPC SCITT Director. Contact details can be obtained from the Stella Kalaidzi (s.kalaidzi@fipc.ac.uk)

Academic Appeals

Formal Stage Guidance

On receipt, an initial evaluation by the investigating officer needs to occur to check that the complaint is submitted under the right procedures within any deadline and in the required format.

At the beginning of the process, key questions include:

- Is this a complaint or an academic appeal? Should the student be referred to another procedure?
- Was early resolution attempted to explain academic decisions and the decision making process? If not, can the matter be referred back to that stage?
- Has the student set out clearly what the academic appeal is about and which areas of FIPC SCITT are involved?
- Has the student provided evidence in support of the academic appeal?
- What outcome is the student hoping for and can it be achieved?
- What assistance or support can be provided to the student in taking this forward?

Some complaints need swift action. These may include:

- Cases where the impact of the issues raised has detrimental consequences for the student's mental health or where the student displays significant distress
- Cases where external time limits apply, for example in meeting regulatory requirements for the completion of professional courses

Timeline:

	Swift action (may be bespoke)	Ordinary action
Receipt of complaint	Day 1	Day 1
↓		
Confirmation of receipt	Day 2	Day 7
↓		
Completion of investigation report	Day 9	Day 28
↓		
Notification of hearing	Day 10	Day 35
↓		
Hearing	Day 17	Day 56
↓		
Written outcome sent	Day 20	Day 60

Complaints Procedure

Completion of Procedures Letter

Dear [*Name of complainant*],

Completion of Procedures Letter

This letter confirms that the internal procedures of FIPC SCITT in relation to your complaint / appeal etc* regarding [please describe] have been completed.

The issues that you raised in your *complaint / appeal etc* were* [*details*]

The issue(s) that were considered in relation to your *complaint / appeal etc was / were**: [*brief summary of the complaint etc*].

The final decision of *[name of higher education provider]* is* [*detail*] because [*reasons*].

FIPC SCITT subscribes to the independent scheme for the review of student complaints. If you are dissatisfied with the outcome you may be able to apply for a review of *your complaint / appeal etc** to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) provided that the complaint you take to the OIA is eligible under its Rules.

Should you decide to make a complaint to the OIA, your OIA Complaint Form **must be received by the OIA** within **12 months** of the date of this letter, that is, it must be received by the OIA **on or before** [*insert date - e.g. if the Completion of Procedures Letter is dated 9 July 2015, this date should be 9 July 2016*].

[*Include here any factors of which the provider is aware which mean that it is particularly important for the student to bring the complaint promptly.]*

You can fill in the OIA's complaint form online or download a copy from the OIA website. http://oiahe.org.uk/making-a-complaint-to-the-oia/oia-complaint-form.aspx. The OIA also publishes *An Introduction to the OIA Scheme for Students*, which can be downloaded from https://www.oiahe.org.uk/media/2264/intrototheoia-students-jan-2019.pdf. Alternatively, you can telephone or write to the OIA for a form. **You should send a copy of this letter to the OIA with your OIA Complaint Form.**

Guidance on submitting a complaint to the OIA and the OIA Complaint Form can also be found on the OIA's website https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students/how-to-complain-to-us/ You may also wish to seek advice from the Students' Union about taking your complaint to the OIA.

Please note that the OIA will normally only review issues that have been dealt with through the provider's internal procedures.

Yours sincerely,

[Authorised signatory]

Academic Appeals

Review Stage Guidance

The Review Stage requires all documentation from the Early Resolution Stage and the Formal Stage to be submitted for review.

At the start of the process, key questions are:

- Were the relevant procedures followed during the formal stage?
- Was the outcome reasonable in the circumstances?
- Has the student received clear reasons why the academic appeal was rejected at the formal stage?
- If new material evidence has been provided, has the student given valid reasons for not supplying this earlier?

The reviewer has 3 courses of action:

- Uphold the outcome from the Formal Stage
    - Explain in writing how and when FIPC SCITT will implement any remedy
    - Send a Completion of Procedures Letter
- Overturn the outcome from the Formal Stage
    - Explain in writing with clear reasons for the decision
    - Aim to help the student decide whether or not to pursue the matter further
    - Explain about the OIA Independent External Review option
    - Send a Completion of Procedures Letter
- Refer the complaint back to the Formal Stage, where the process will be repeated (for example in the case of new evidence)

The complainant has 14 days to request a review after the completion of the Formal Stage.

The reviewer has 16 days to notify the complainant of the decision.

This stage will take no longer than 30 days.

Written date: March 2025
Renew date: March 2027