Guidance on Academic Appeals – 2020


29. Academic Appeals

Academic Appeals should be conducted in line with the requirements of Annex 13: Academic Appeals of the Credit Framework, with the Covid-19 related exception noted in the commentary below on an allowance for student to seek early informal resolution.

Covid-19 commentary: The University will allow students to seek a speedy resolution of some matters directly with the School in the first instance without needing to initiate the formal appeals process. To do so, students should contact the School Office of the Board of Examiners which made the decision that requires investigation and clarification.

Such matters may include a licence for students to seek clarification of recorded marks for which an error is suspected, or of the detail how specific applications for mitigation were considered and what outcomes, if any, were applied, or of a need to supply new documentary evidence (where appropriate) or an application for mitigating circumstances not previously considered by the Board.

1. Background

The deadline for students to formally submit an appeal to the Faculty is normally 21-days from the date of the release of results. Due to the impact of Covid-19 on both the examination process and the mitigation process, this has been changed to 10-working-days from the date of the release of results. The aim of the shorter deadline is to ensure that appeal outcomes are communicated in time to prevent students being disadvantaged, for example, by ensuring that they can take resits in August or graduate in July. As students are not expected to obtain evidence to support their appeal (see 2.c.i below), it is felt that the shorter deadline is achievable and reasonable. It is acknowledged that, as the deadline has been changed mid-course, the Faculties Support Office will exercise flexibility and discretion in accepting appeals beyond the 10-working-day deadline in some circumstances, for example, where informal early resolution has not been successful or a student was not aware of the change in the deadline.

Schools should advise students to contact the Student Union Advice Centre who will provide advice and support on informal early resolution and the appeals process: https://kentunion.co.uk/welfare/advice.

2. Informal Early Resolution

In the first instance, it is beneficial to resolve concerns and queries about recommendations of Boards of Examiners as early as possible and prior to entering the formal appeal process. Speedy resolution helps to limit the anxiety and stress for students and removes some of the administrative burden for both students and staff.
Students should first raise their concern with their School Office; this will be the School that ran the Board of Examiners meeting. Schools should clearly advertise the primary email contact point to the students (for example, in their results letters, FAQs, on their website, etc). Schools are encouraged to ensure that the School contact point can be managed consistently during the summer period to avoid potential delays where staff are on leave.

The following circumstances may be raised directly with the School Office:

a. **Clarification regarding marks**: for example, checking that marks have been input accurately, confirming that there were no computer errors in the marking of a multiple choice paper, and rechecking the total marks for a module;

b. **Confirmation of mitigation for extenuating circumstances**: to confirm that extenuating circumstances were taken into consideration, what adjustments (if any) were made and an explanation of the reasons for the decision taken;

c. **Submission of supplementary information or new extenuating circumstances**:

   i. **Existing extenuating circumstances**: Boards of Examiners may wish to request more information from the student after the Board has met in order to clarify the circumstances. The Board of Examiners will contact the student if it wishes to request such information, providing a deadline for the student to respond. Where possible, the Board should agree on potential outcomes according to the student’s response. *Please note that supporting evidence need not be provided in relation to any Covid-19 related extenuating circumstances. Where circumstances are unrelated to the disruptive impact of the pandemic, it is understood that evidence may be more difficult to obtain at present and students are not expected to provide it in order for their appeal to be considered.*

   ii. **New extenuating circumstances**: where a student wishes to inform the Board of Examiners of new extenuating circumstances that were not previously made known to the Board in time for its meeting.

3. **Deadlines**

   Students seeking informal early resolution due to the circumstances laid out above, should contact the School Office **as soon as possible** and within **5-working-days**. This will allow the School to respond in time for the student to enter the formal appeals process, if needed.

   Boards of Examiners should aim to provide a written response to students within **2-working-days** of receipt of their concern. This will ensure that, where early informal resolution has not proven successful, students are still able to proceed to the formal stages of the appeals process. So that students are not disadvantaged by attempting to take early informal resolution, the **10-working-day** deadline for appeal to the Faculty may need to be applied flexibly.

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1 NB: the Guidance for Examiners states that Schools should respond within 7-days, however, this is not feasible within the timeframe hence the request for Schools to aim to respond within 2-working-days.
4. Outcomes

Circumstances a), b) and c.i) above, may be actioned by a member of the School Office. Depending on the information requested, some c.i) circumstance may need to be referred back to the Board of Examiners.

Circumstance c.ii) should be considered by the Mitigation Committee and actions recommended to the Board of Examiners in the usual way. The Chair of the Board of Examiners should consult with at least two members of the Board in order to make its recommendation.

If a student is not satisfied with the outcome of their informal early resolution enquiry, they may appeal to the Faculty. Information on how to do so is available on the Faculties Support Office website: https://www.kent.ac.uk/fso/appeals/index.html. There will be flexibility in accepting appeals beyond the 10-working-day deadline so that students are not disadvantaged. Students are encouraged to explain in their appeal form that they have attempted informal early resolution and the outcome; this will help to speed up the process.

Where mark adjustments are made as a result of informal early resolution, the Board of Examiners should arrange for the student’s record to be amended. This may entail informing the Central Student Administration Office, confirming a new degree classification with the External Examiner, and running an amended pass list. This list is not exhaustive.