

Student Complaints & Appeals Policy

Academic year 2023 / 2024

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Complaints & Appeals Policy

Introduction

Study Group is committed to providing a high-quality student experience across the educational services we offer our students through our International Study Centres/ International College (ISCs) or via Study Group Digital Learning (SGDL).

However, it is recognised that students will sometimes become dissatisfied with a service we have provided or failed to provide. For example, there may be disagreement regarding the outcome of a refund request or how the regulations have been applied. There may also be occasions where students have grounds to appeal a decision made by an assessment board.

This document has been written for both students and Study Group colleagues to outline the policy regarding any student complaint or academic appeal. It also gives more information on how each complaint or appeal should be considered by detailing each stage of the processes. Regardless of when you use this document (whether it is from early consideration through to formal resolution and review) it has been designed to provide you with information about how an appeal or complaint can be made and what each person involved in the process can expect.

Should you have any questions about the information in this document, please contact the named person at your ISC or SGDL student support team who deals with appeals and complaints, or the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office at gae@studygroup.com.

Section 1 - Complaints

Introduction

1. Study Group seeks to provide the highest level of service at all times. However, there may be occasions when a registered student feels that the level of service has not been good enough and wishes to raise a complaint.
2. The emphasis of the process is on addressing the complaint and arriving at an acceptable outcome as quickly as possible. Complaints will be taken seriously and will be investigated thoroughly. Where necessary, swift and effective action will be taken to resolve a complaint and every effort will be made to prevent a recurrence. Where, however, a complaint is made with spiteful or malicious intent, this will be viewed seriously and may result in disciplinary action. Study Group will fulfil its obligations to the individual(s) against whom a complaint is made, and investigations will be undertaken impartially.
3. Students who raise complaints should note that:
 - they will not suffer any disadvantage as a result of making a complaint;
 - everyone who responds to, investigates or makes decisions about complaints are required to do so impartially are not permitted to be involved with investigating or resolving complaints where they have a potential conflict of interest;
 - privacy and confidentiality will be respected as far as possible at all stages of the process; and
 - complaints will be considered on their own merits and on their particular facts and circumstances so that natural justice may be done.
4. Students are expected to put their name to any complaint they make. If a student does not wish for their name to be disclosed, they may request that the investigator(s) anonymise their complaint. The investigator(s) will only agree to anonymise a complaint if there are sufficient and valid reasons for doing so. This is because complaints made anonymously are difficult, and sometimes inappropriate or impossible, to investigate.
5. The ISC/SGDL student support team and/or Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office will keep a record of complaints and will use the outcomes to inform future service provision.

Formal & informal complaints

6. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about Study Group's (the provider) action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the provider.
7. An Appeal, as opposed to a complaint, is made where a student feels that an academic process has not been followed or where there is a grievance on academic grounds. Appeals against academic judgement will not be heard.
8. Students should refer to the [appeals section](#) below for details of what constitutes grounds for appeal.
9. Students should refer to the 'Student Disciplinary Policy' if they wish to appeal the outcome of a disciplinary case.

10. If a student is unclear which procedure to follow, they should seek guidance from the ISC/SGDL student support team.

Stage 1: Informal Complaint

11. The normal expectation is that students try to resolve a complaint or concern about the provision of a service (whether academic or non-academic) informally with the person(s) providing the service. The issue should be raised as early as possible so that a quick resolution may be achieved. In some instances, it may be more appropriate to discuss the complaint or concern informally with the Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL.
12. If a student feels happier discussing any concerns they may have, in confidence, before deciding whether or not to pursue a complaint, their personal tutor (or other member of ISC/SGDL staff) will be there to help. The emphasis of these discussions will be on arriving at a satisfactory resolution of the complaint as quickly as possible, rather than on making a judgment about who is right or wrong.
13. Questions to consider when attempting early resolution of a complaint could include:
 - What specifically is the concern about, and which area(s) of the provider is/are involved?
 - What outcome is the student hoping for and how 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?
 - Would it be helpful to use confidential mediation or conciliation, and are the student and provider willing to do so?
 - What assistance or support can be provided to the student in taking this forward?

Record keeping

14. The ISC/SGDL student support team should keep a record of each informal complaint including details of any discussions with the student/relevant members of staff and relevant email exchanges or other written communication. This information may be required for any future investigation.
15. If a complaint has not been resolved to the student's satisfaction through informal discussion, the student has declined to engage with early resolution, or the student believes that the complaint is of a more serious nature, then they have the right to make a formal written complaint to the Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL using the [stage 2 Student Complaint form](#).

Stage 2: Formal Complaint

16. Where it has not been possible to resolve matters satisfactorily at source, or the student feels unable to make direct contact with the person responsible, the matter should be taken to the Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL. Formal complaints should be submitted in writing using the [stage 2 Student Complaint form](#), and should include an

indication of what reasonable steps the student would like to see taken to resolve the matter.

17. Complaints will not be accepted from third parties unless written confirmation has been submitted by the student granting the provider permission to liaise with a third party as their representative.
18. Where a complaint affects a number of students, those students may submit a group complaint. In such circumstances, the group must nominate a representative to act on their behalf and through whom the provider will liaise.
19. Students will be provided with an acknowledgement of receipt of their complaint and be given an indication of the likely timescale to investigate and reach a decision (this should be **within 20 working days** of receipt). The investigation should be completed as swiftly as possible, and the student should be notified in the event of any delay in the process.
20. The Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL should ensure that relevant members of staff are involved at all stages of the process, and ensure they are informed of the outcome of the investigation of the complaint.
21. To facilitate the investigation, meetings may be arranged between the Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL (or other appropriate person within the ISC/SGDL team) and:
 - the student (and/or their representative);
 - any material witnesses; and/or
 - the person(s) against whom the complaint has been made (who may be accompanied by a colleague or union officer)
22. In circumstances where it is necessary for the Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL to meet with the person(s) against whom a complaint is made, the personal details (including names) of any witness statements submitted as part of the complaint must not be divulged to the person(s) against whom the complaint has been made.
23. A written record of all meetings that take place as part of the investigation should be retained by the Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL.
24. Key questions the Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL may consider when a stage 2 formal complaint is received could include:
 - Is this a complaint or academic appeal? Should the student be referred to another procedure?
 - Was early resolution attempted? If not, should the matter be referred back to that stage?
 - Has the student set out clearly what the complaint is about and which area(s) of the provider is/are involved?
 - Has the student provided evidence in support of the complaint (where possible or applicable)?
 - What outcome is the student hoping for and can it be achieved?
 - Is the complaint suitable for mediation or conciliation?
 - What assistance or support can be provided to the student in taking this forward?

25. Some complaints may require the Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL to take particularly swift action. These may include, but are not limited to:
 - complaints involving a threat of serious harm;
 - cases where the impact of the issues raised has detrimental consequences for the student's mental health or where the student displays significant distress;
 - complaints relating to disability support;
 - issues of serious and repeated service failure and/or significant delay; and
 - issues of a highly sensitive nature.
26. The Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL may consult with the University Partnerships Director should a second opinion be required.
27. Once the investigation is complete, the student (and/or their representative) will be advised in writing of the actions taken to investigate the complaint, the outcome of the investigation (with a clear explanation of the reason(s) the complaint was rejected, where applicable) and advice about the student's right to escalate the complaint for review by an independent University Partnerships Director (via the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office) should they remain dissatisfied.
28. Should the student choose or neglect to escalate the complaint to the stage 3 complaints process within **10 working days** of the date of the Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL's outcome letter, they may request a Completion of Procedures (COP) letter. The letter will explain that the provider's internal processes have not been completed. COP letters will not be issued at the end of stage 2 unless specifically requested by the student.

Record keeping

29. The Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL should keep a full record of every formal complaint including the completed stage 2 complaint form, details of any discussions with the student/relevant members of staff, and relevant email exchanges or other written communication. This information may be required for any future investigation.
30. Upon completion of the investigation, the Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL (or nominated professional services staff member) should upload the full case file to the secure complaints repository on Huddle (including scans of any hard copies). The title of the file should be comprised of the following in the order specified:
 - Prefix - an identifier specific to the ISC/SGDL (e.g., 'RHL', 'LJM' or 'SUR')
 - Name - student name (full)
 - Number - case number (specific to the case not the student).
31. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office will use the case files to maintain a central log of all formal complaints.

Stage 3: Independent Review

32. If the student remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the stage 2 complaint, they may request a review of how their complaint was handled; this is stage 3 of the complaints process.

33. A stage 3 complaint must be made on at least one of the following grounds:
- a breach of the procedures set out in this Complaints & Appeals Policy;
 - clear feedback was not provided to explain why the complaint was not upheld at an earlier stage;
 - bias or prejudice on the part of those who considered the complaint during an earlier stage;
 - a consideration of whether the outcome was reasonable in the circumstances; and/or
 - new material evidence which the student was unable, for valid reasons, to provide at an earlier stage.
34. To request an independent review, the student should complete a [stage 3 Student Complaint form](#) and submit it to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office (gae@studygroup.com) within **10 working days** of the date on the stage 2 outcome letter from the Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office will acknowledge receipt, undertake administrative arrangements with respect to the stage 3 complaint and notify the student of any anticipated delays.
35. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office will check whether the complaint has been submitted based on acceptable grounds and whether it has been submitted within the required timeframe. If not, the student will be informed in writing of the reasons that the complaint will not be heard and will be advised of their right to complain to the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator](#) (OIA), (or the [Irish Council for International Students](#) (ICOS) or [Citizens Information](#) if they are studying in Ireland), or to the partner university for validated provision, the time limit for doing so, and where to access further guidance.
36. If the stage 3 complaint has been submitted on acceptable grounds and within the permitted timeframe, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office will appoint an independent University Partnerships Director from the Study Group network to review the complaint. The University Partnerships Director will not be directly connected to the ISC/SGDL in question to ensure impartiality.
37. The independent review (stage 3) will not usually consider the issues afresh or involve a further investigation. A complaint must have been considered at the stage 2 level before it can be escalated to the independent review stage.
38. The independent University Partnerships Director may request additional information or clarification from the relevant Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL in order to assist in their review and may, at their discretion, convene a small panel (of suitably independent staff) to assist them in their decision.
39. The independent University Partnerships Director will consider the information submitted and determine whether or not the stage 3 complaint should be upheld.
40. The independent University Partnerships Director will provide the student with written confirmation of the outcome of their review within **20 working days** of receipt of the stage 3 complaint form.

41. If the complaint has not been upheld, the outcome of the review will be communicated to the student in writing by issuing a Completion of Procedures (COP) letter as soon as possible (within **20 working days**). The letter should include a clear explanation and outline the reasons for the decision in straightforward language (see the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's website for [COP Letter Guidance](#)).
42. The COP letter should also advise the student about their right to submit a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), (or the [Irish Council for International Students](#) (ICOS) or [Citizens Information](#) if they are studying in Ireland), or to the partner university for validated provision, the time limit for doing so, and where to access further guidance.
43. If the stage 3 complaint has been submitted on the basis of new material evidence and the independent University Partnerships Director is satisfied that the student has given valid reasons for not supplying the evidence earlier, the complaint will be referred back to the Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL to review their initial decision in light of the new evidence. The independent University Partnerships Director will inform the student of the referral in writing within **20 working days** of receipt of the stage 3 complaint.
44. If the complaint is upheld, (the independent University Partnerships Director may overturn the Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL's decision made at stage 2), the student will be informed in writing with an explanation of how and when any remedy will be implemented. The letter should be issued within **20 working days** of receipt of the stage 3 complaint form.
45. If the complaint is upheld, a COP letter may be issued if requested by the student but will not be issued otherwise.

Record keeping

46. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office should keep a full record of every stage 3 complaint including the completed stage 3 Student Complaint form, details of any discussions with the student/relevant members of staff, and relevant email exchanges or other written communication. This information may be required for any future investigation.
47. Upon completion of the stage 3 complaint, the independent University Partnerships Director should provide the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office with the full case file to be stored securely and to make all relevant updates to the central log.

Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education

48. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) is an independent body set up to review students' complaints against universities (and other qualifying Education providers) within England and Wales. Study Group Limited is an English provider, therefore any of our students may submit a complaint to the OIA, with the exception of those studying at Dublin ISC.
49. Students studying at Dublin ISC are registered with Study Group Ireland. Should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaints and appeals process, they may complain to the [Irish Council for International Students](#) (ICOS) or [Citizens Information](#). The remaining paragraphs of this section are not relevant for Dublin ISC students.

50. Once a student's complaint has been considered through **all stages** of our complaints and appeals process, they have the right to lodge a complaint with the OIA should they remain unsatisfied with the final decision.
51. A Completion of Procedures Letter (COP) will be issued to the student at the end of the complaints and appeals process when there are no further steps to be taken internally. If the complaint is not upheld, a Completion of Procedures Letter will be automatically issued. If the complaint is upheld (or partly upheld), a Completion of Procedures Letter can be requested if desired. More information about Completion of Procedures Letters can be found here: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/providers/completion-of-procedures-letters>.
52. The OIA will only consider complaints from students who are (or were, for former students) registered on a Higher Education course/programme and who have completed the provider's internal complaints or appeals process.
53. The OIA will only consider student complaints received within 12 months of the completion of the provider's internal complaints or appeals processes.
54. The OIA will NOT consider complaints about academic judgement, frivolous or vexatious complaints or complaints that have been dealt with before by the OIA. There are other restrictions to the types of complaints the OIA will consider; full details can be found on the OIA's website.
55. For full details of the OIA's processes and procedures (including their complaint form), please refer to the OIA's website: www.oiahe.org.uk.

Frivolous or Vexatious Complaints

56. The provider reserves the right to terminate consideration of a complaint if it is considered to be frivolous or vexatious. Examples of such complaints include:
 - complaints which are obsessive, harassing, or repetitive;
 - insistence on pursuing non-meritorious complaints and/or unrealistic, unreasonable outcomes;
 - insistence on pursuing what may be valid complaints in an unreasonable manner;
 - complaints that are designed to cause disruption or annoyance; and/or
 - demands for redress which lack any serious purpose or value.
57. Should the provider determine at any stage of the complaints process that a complaint is frivolous or vexatious, the complaint handler will inform the student in writing (within **20 working days** of receipt of the complaint form) that consideration has been terminated and the reasons for this decision. The student will also be informed of their right to escalate the matter to the Academic Registrar for further consideration should they remain dissatisfied, and the method by which to do so.
58. To escalate the matter, the student should re-submit full documentation (including all completed formal complaint forms, all supporting evidence, and the complaint handler's letter confirming that consideration of the complaint has been terminated) to gae@studygroup.com for the attention of the Academic Registrar. The student should indicate that they are escalating the matter for further consideration.

59. Any escalations to the Academic Registrar must be made within **10 working days** of the date of the original complaint outcome letter. An acknowledgement of receipt of the escalation will be provided.
60. The Academic Registrar will provide the student with written confirmation of their decision within **20 working days** of receipt of the escalation. In the event of any delay, the student will be informed in writing.
61. If the escalation has not been upheld, the outcome will be communicated to the student in writing by issuing a Completion of Procedures (COP) letter as soon as possible and within **20 working days**. The letter should include a clear explanation and outline the reasons for the decision in straightforward language (see the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's website for [COP Letter Guidance](#)).
62. The COP letter should also advise the student about their right to submit a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), (or the [Irish Council for International Students](#) (ICOS) or [Citizens Information](#) if they are studying in Ireland), or to the partner university for validated provision, the time limit for doing so, and where to access further guidance.
63. If the escalation has been upheld, (the Academic Registrar may overturn the complaint handler's original decision), the student will be informed in writing (within **20 working days**), with an explanation of how and when any remedy will be implemented.
64. If the escalation is upheld a COP letter may be issued if requested by the student but will not be issued otherwise.

Record keeping

65. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office should keep a full record of every escalation including all relevant completed forms, details of any discussions with the student/relevant members of staff, and relevant email exchanges or other written communication. This information may be required for any future investigation.
66. Upon completion of the escalation, the Academic Registrar should provide the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office with the full case file in order for it to be stored securely and to make all relevant updates to the central log.

Section 2 – Appeals

Introduction

67. An Appeal can be made where a student feels that an academic process has not been followed or where there is a grievance on academic grounds. Appeals against academic judgement will not be heard.
68. Appeals can also be made against decisions made by Academic Misconduct Panels and mitigating/extenuating/personal circumstances outcomes.
69. Complaints, as opposed to appeals, are expressions of dissatisfaction about Study Group's (the provider) actions or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the provider. Students should refer to the [complaints section](#) above for further details.
70. Students should refer to the 'Student Disciplinary Policy' if they wish to appeal the outcome of a disciplinary case.
71. If a student is unclear which procedure to follow, they should seek guidance from a member of staff at the ISC/SGDL student support team.
72. The guiding principles for the consideration of an appeal are:
 - timely decision making;
 - availability of representation;
 - the impartiality of the decision makers;
 - openness and transparency of decision-making;
 - the opportunity for both sides to have their views considered;
 - proper recording of the reasons for the decision; and
 - the possibility of review.

Who can appeal and when

73. All students have the right to appeal, however it is not possible to appeal against matters of academic judgement.
74. A student may not appeal before formal notification of the results is given (in the case of an academic appeal) or before outcomes are formally confirmed (in the case of an Academic Misconduct Panel or mitigating/extenuating/personal circumstances appeal).
75. Students should initiate the appeal on their own behalf. Exceptionally, where there are special circumstances, an appeal may be made on a student's behalf by a nominated representative, providing written confirmation has been submitted by the student granting the provider permission to liaise with the third party.
76. Where an appeal affects a number of students, those students may submit a group appeal. In such circumstances, the group must nominate a representative to act on their behalf and through whom the provider will liaise.

Grounds for appeal

77. All appeals against a decision of an **assessment board** must be made on at least one of the following grounds:

- a procedural irregularity in the assessment process (including alleged administrative error which could have led the assessment board to reach a different conclusion had the error not been made);
 - inadequate assessment, prejudice or bias on the part of the examiners; and/or
 - medical, personal or other circumstances which affected a student's performance of which the examiners were unaware at the time of the assessment.
78. All appeals against the decision of an **Academic Misconduct Panel** must be made on at least one of the following grounds:
- a procedural irregularity in the consideration of the case;
 - prejudice or bias on the part of the staff considering the case; and/or
 - an unreasonable outcome (decision and/or penalty applied).
79. All appeals against the outcome of a **mitigating/extenuating/personal circumstances claim** must be made on at least one of the following grounds:
- a procedural irregularity in the consideration of the claim;
 - prejudice or bias on the part of the staff considering the claim; and/or
 - relevant additional material evidence which could not reasonably have been submitted at the time the claim was made.
80. Appeals against the exercise of academic judgment will not be heard. If a student does not understand why they have received a lower mark than expected, they should contact the person responsible for the class and ask for feedback on their performance.
81. Failure to operate to the timescales defined in these procedures does not in itself constitute grounds for an appeal decision to be invalid.

Implications for continued attendance and progression

82. Where a student has not yet completed their current course/programme and an academic appeal outcome is pending, the student will normally be allowed to continue to attend classes (subject to the agreement of the assessment board or its nominee) in order not to prejudice their studies should the appeal be upheld. However, if the appeal is not upheld, the student may subsequently be asked to leave the classes.
83. Where a student has completed their current course/programme and are appealing against an assessment board decision, they will not normally be provided with a transcript and are therefore unlikely to be permitted to progress to their chosen university course/programme before the appeal is heard.

Stage 1: Appeals Panel

Timing and format of appeals

84. All appeals should be submitted in writing using the [stage 1 Student Appeal form](#) (available from the ISC/SGDL student support team), together with supporting documentary evidence, to the Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL.

85. Appeals must be submitted within **10 working days** of the issuance of the Record of Results (in the case of academic appeals) or formal notification of the outcome (in the case of an Academic Misconduct Panel or mitigating/extenuating/personal circumstances decision).
86. All supporting documentation must be securely attached and students should fully explain their grounds for appeal, as well as the outcome(s) sought (e.g. a further attempt at a failed examination).
87. Where an appeal is based on circumstances that the student might reasonably have been expected to have brought to the attention of the ISC/SGDL student support team before the meeting of the assessment board or Academic Misconduct Panel, such as medical or personal circumstances, the student should explain why these were not brought to the notice of the ISC/SGDL student support team at an earlier date.
88. An appeal submitted by the appropriate deadline will be heard within **20 working days** of receipt by the ISC/SGDL student support team unless there are unusual circumstances surrounding the case. The student will be informed in writing if any delays are anticipated.

Procedure for the consideration of appeals

89. The ISC/SGDL student support team will send an acknowledgement within **5 working days** of receipt of an appeal submitted during term time and **10 working days** if submitted outside of term time. The student will be notified of any unavoidable delays in addressing the appeal (e.g. the absence of the individual(s) required to provide a response) as early as possible.
90. On receipt of the documentation, the Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL will check whether the student has provided sufficient information for the Appeals Panel to make a decision, whether the grounds for appeal have been met, and whether the appeal has been submitted within the required timeframe. If not, the student will either be asked to submit further information, or be informed in writing of the reasons that the appeal will not be heard and will be advised of their right to appeal to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office.
91. The Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL is only permitted to determine whether the appeal meets the grounds for appeal, gather sufficient information from the student to proceed, and determine whether the appeal has been submitted within the permitted timeframe. The Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL is not permitted to make a judgement with respect to the appeal itself. Only the Appeals Panel is permitted to make judgements as to whether or not an appeal is upheld.
92. If there are grounds for appeal, the ISC/SGDL student support team will send a copy of the appeal documentation to the relevant tutor or their nominee(s) to comment on the appeal. These individuals may consult colleagues or investigate the appeal as appropriate.
93. Where an appeal alleges inadequate assessment, bias or prejudice on the part of staff acting as an examiner, the Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL may consult colleagues or investigate the appeal as appropriate. In particular they may wish to consult any colleague named in the appeal.

94. An Appeals Panel at ISC/SGDL level will be set up taking care to ensure impartiality in membership with regard to the individual appeals under consideration. Anyone who has previously been involved in a particular case (in any capacity) cannot be involved in the appeal decision-making process. The ISC/SGDL student support team may source panel members from other ISCs in the network if it is necessary to ensure impartiality.
95. The Appeals Panel should take care to consider and respond to all the grounds for appeal presented by the student and, if appropriate, explain why certain grounds were not considered.

Student attendance at the Appeals Panel

96. The Appeals Panel may invite the student to attend a meeting in order to discuss the appeal. At the Panel's discretion, remote attendance may be facilitated.
97. At least **5 working days** before the meeting is due to take place, the student will be notified in writing of the date, time, venue and other arrangements for the meeting (such as instructions on how to join the meeting remotely, if applicable).
98. The student has the right to be accompanied and/or to be represented at the meeting by a person of their choice (subject to the agreement of that individual). The student must notify the Appeals Panel of the name of any individual who will be accompanying or representing them at the meeting.
99. Academic appeals procedures are internal to the provider, therefore it would not be appropriate for a student to be legally represented at a meeting of the Appeals Panel, except in the most exceptional circumstances.
100. If the student is in attendance, the meeting will be conducted as follows:
 - the student (or their representative) will be given an opportunity to explain the ground(s) for appeal;
 - if the student wishes to introduce new grounds at the meeting, the Panel will consider whether such new grounds can be admitted; and
 - the panel may put questions to the student.

Outcome of the stage 1 appeal

101. The student will be informed in writing of the decision of the Appeals Panel within **20 working days** of the initial submission to the ISC/SGDL student support team. The student (and/or their representative) will be advised in writing of the outcome of the investigation (with a clear explanation of the reason(s) the appeal was rejected, where applicable) and advice about the student's right to escalate the appeal for review to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office should they remain dissatisfied.
102. If the appeal is upheld, the student will be informed in writing with an explanation of how and when any remedy will be implemented. The letter should be issued within **20 working days** of receipt of the appeal by the ISC/SGDL student support team.
103. Should the student choose or neglect to escalate the appeal to the stage 2 process within **10 working days** of the date of the Appeals Panel outcome letter, they may request a Completion of Proceedings (COP) letter. The letter will explain that the

provider's internal processes have not been completed. COP letters will not be issued at the end of stage 1 unless specifically requested by the student.

Record keeping

104. The ISC/SGDL student support team should keep a full record of every stage 1 appeal including the completed stage 1 Student Appeal form, details of any discussions with the student/relevant members of staff, records from the Appeals Panel, and relevant email exchanges or other written communication. This information may be required for any future investigation.
105. Upon completion of the investigation, the Head of Centre/Centre Director/Head of SGDL (or nominated professional services staff member) should upload the full case file to the secure appeals repository on Huddle (including scans of any hard copies). The title of the file should be comprised of the following in the order specified:
 - Prefix - an identifier specific to the ISC/SGDL (e.g., 'RHL', 'LJM', or 'SUR')
 - Name - student name (full)
 - Number - case number (specific to the case not the student).
106. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office will use the case files to maintain a central log of all formal appeals.

Stage 2: Independent Appeal Review

Grounds for review

107. If a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of the stage 1 appeal, they have the right to escalate the appeal to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office for an independent appeal review. All such appeals must be made on at least one of the following grounds:
 - new material evidence which the student was unable, for valid reasons, to provide at an earlier stage;
 - bias or prejudice on the part of those who dealt with the appeal at the Appeals Panel;
 - a consideration of whether the outcome was reasonable in the circumstances; and/or
 - a breach by the Appeals Panel of the procedure set out in this Complaints & Appeals Policy.

Timing and format of independent review

108. An appeal to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office (stage 2) may only be lodged after written notification has been given of the outcome of a stage 1 appeal.
109. Students should complete a [stage 2 Student Appeal form](#) and submit it to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office (gae@studygroup.com) within **10 working days** of the stage 1 appeal outcome letter. Appeals received after this period will not be accepted without the prior agreement of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office, and only where good reason is given.

110. All supporting documentation must be securely attached, and students should fully explain their grounds for appeal, as well as the outcome(s) sought (e.g. a further attempt at a failed examination).
111. Stage 2 appeals to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office must be supported by a copy of the stage 1 Student Appeal form, the response received from the Appeals Panel and all available and appropriate evidence (e.g. medical certificates). Copies of these may, if necessary, be obtained from the ISC/SGDL student support team.
112. An acknowledgement of receipt will be sent to the student within **5 working days**. The student will be notified of any unavoidable delays in addressing the appeal (e.g. the absence of the individual(s) required to provide a response) as early as possible.

Procedure for independent appeal review

113. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office will check whether the appeal is based on acceptable grounds and whether it has been submitted within the required timeframe. If not, the student will be informed in writing of the reasons that the appeal will not be heard and will be advised of their right to complain to the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator](#) (OIA), (or the [Irish Council for International Students](#) (ICOS) or [Citizens Information](#) if they are studying in Ireland), or to the partner university for validated provision, the time limit for doing so, and where to access further guidance.
114. If the stage 2 appeal has been submitted on acceptable grounds and within the permitted timeframe, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office will appoint an independent senior member of staff from the Study Group network to review the appeal. The staff member will not be directly connected to the ISC/SGDL in question to ensure impartiality.
115. The independent review (stage 2) will not usually consider the issues afresh or involve a further investigation. An appeal must have been considered at the stage 1 level before it can be escalated to the independent review stage.
116. The independent reviewer may request additional information or clarification from the Appeals Panel in order to assist in their review and may, at their discretion, convene a small panel (of suitably independent staff) to assist them in their decision.
117. Key questions the independent reviewer may consider when a stage 2 appeal is received could include:
 - Were the relevant procedures followed during the stage 1 appeal process?
 - Was the outcome reasonable in the circumstances?
 - Has the student received clear reasons why the appeal was rejected at stage 1?
 - If new material evidence has been provided, has the student given valid reasons for not supplying this earlier?
118. The student will be provided with written confirmation of the outcome of their review within **20 working days** of receipt of the stage 2 appeal form.
119. If the appeal has not been upheld, the outcome of the review will be communicated to the student in writing by issuing a Completion of Procedures (COP) letter as soon as possible (within **20 working days** of receipt of the stage 2 appeal form). The letter should include a clear explanation and outline the reasons for the decision in

straightforward language (see the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's website for [COP Letter Guidance](#)).

120. The COP letter should also advise the student about their right to submit a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), (or the [Irish Council for International Students](#) (ICOS) or [Citizens Information](#) if they are studying in Ireland), or to the partner university for validated provision, the time limit for doing so, and where to access further guidance.
121. If the stage 2 appeal has been submitted on the basis of new material evidence and the independent reviewer is satisfied that the student has given valid reasons for not supplying the evidence earlier, the appeal will be referred back to the Appeals Panel to review their initial decision in light of the new evidence. The independent reviewer will inform the student of the referral in writing within **20 working days** of receipt of the stage 2 appeal.
122. If the appeal is upheld, (the independent reviewer may overturn the Appeals Panel's decision made at stage 1), the student will be informed in writing with an explanation of how and when any remedy will be implemented. The letter should be issued within **20 working days** of receipt of the stage 2 appeal.
123. If the appeal is upheld, a COP letter may be issued if requested by the student but will not be issued otherwise.

Record keeping

124. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office should keep a full record of every stage 2 appeal including the completed stage 2 student appeal form, details of any discussions with the student/relevant members of staff, and relevant email exchanges or other written communication. This information may be required for any future investigation.
125. Upon completion of the stage 2 appeal, the independent reviewer should provide the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office with the full case file in order for it to be stored securely and to make all relevant updates to the central log.

Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education

126. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) is an independent body set up to review students' complaints against universities (and other qualifying Education providers) within England and Wales. Study Group Limited is an English provider, therefore any of our students may submit a complaint to the OIA, with the exception of those studying at Dublin ISC.
127. Students studying at Dublin ISC are registered with Study Group Ireland. Should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaints and appeals process, they may complain to the [Irish Council for International Students](#) (ICOS) or [Citizens Information](#). The remaining paragraphs of this section are not relevant for Dublin ISC students.
128. Once a student's appeal has been considered through **all stages** of our complaints and appeals process they have the right to lodge a complaint with the OIA should they remain unsatisfied with the final decision.

129. A Completion of Procedures Letter (COP) will be issued to the student at the end of the complaints and appeals process when there are no further steps to be taken internally. If the appeal is not upheld, a Completion of Procedures Letter will be automatically issued. If the appeal is upheld (or partly upheld), a Completion of Procedures Letter can be requested if desired. More information about Completion of Procedures Letters can be found here: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/providers/completion-of-procedures-letters>.
130. The OIA will only consider complaints from students who are (or were, for former students) registered on a Higher Education course/programme and who have completed the provider's internal complaints or appeals process.
131. The OIA will only consider student complaints received within 12 months of the completion of the provider's internal complaints or appeals processes.
132. The OIA will NOT consider complaints about academic judgement, frivolous or vexatious complaints or complaints that have been dealt with before by the OIA. There are other restrictions to the types of complaints the OIA will consider; full details can be found on the OIA's website.
133. For full details of the OIA's processes and procedures (including their complaint form), please refer to the OIA's website: www.oiahe.org.uk.

Frivolous or Vexatious Appeals

134. The provider reserves the right to terminate consideration of an appeal if it is considered to be frivolous or vexatious. Examples of such appeals include:
 - appeals which are obsessive, harassing or repetitive;
 - insistence on pursuing non-meritorious appeals and/or unrealistic, unreasonable outcomes;
 - insistence on pursuing what may be valid appeals in an unreasonable manner;
 - appeals that are designed to cause disruption or annoyance; and/or
 - demands for redress which lack any serious purpose or value.
135. Should the provider determine at any stage of the appeals process that an appeal is frivolous or vexatious, the appeal handler will inform the student in writing (within **20 working days** of receipt of the appeal form) that consideration has been terminated and the reasons for this decision. The student will also be informed of their right to escalate the matter to the Academic Registrar for further consideration should they remain dissatisfied, and the method by which to do so.
136. To escalate the matter, the student should re-submit full documentation (all completed appeal forms, all supporting evidence, and the appeal handler's letter confirming that consideration of the appeal has been terminated) to gae@studygroup.com for the attention of the Academic Registrar. The student should indicate that they are escalating the matter for further consideration.
137. Any escalations to the Academic Registrar must be made within **10 working days** of the date of the original appeal outcome letter. An acknowledgement of receipt of the escalation will be provided.

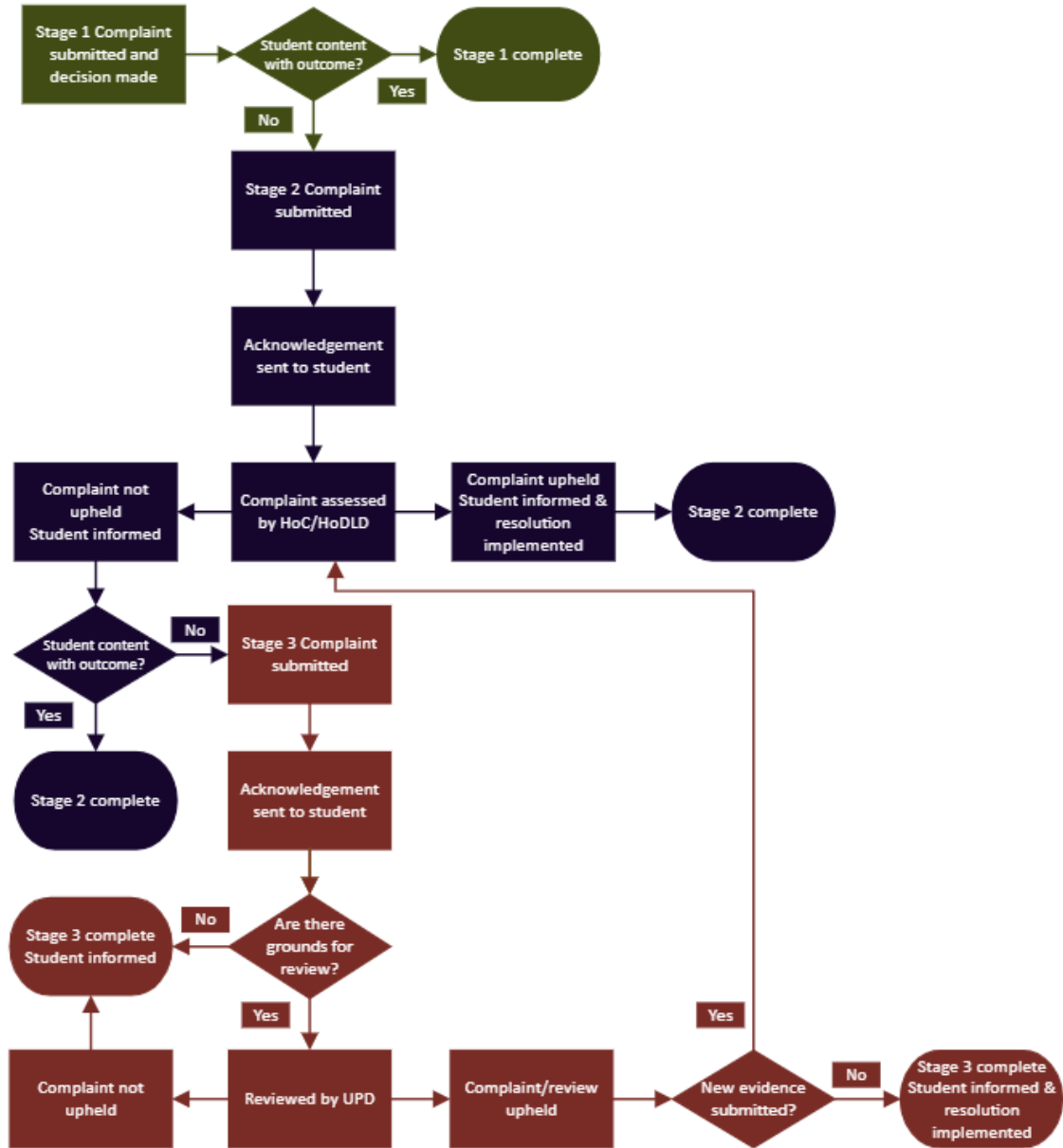
138. The Academic Registrar will provide the student with written confirmation of their decision within **20 working days** of receipt of the escalation. In the event of any delay, the student will be informed in writing.
139. If the escalation has not been upheld, the outcome will be communicated to the student in writing by issuing a Completion of Procedures (COP) letter as soon as possible and within **20 working days**. The letter should include a clear explanation and outline the reasons for the decision in straightforward language (see the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's website for [COP Letter Guidance](#)).
140. The COP letter should also advise the student about their right to submit a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), (or the [Irish Council for International Students](#) (ICOS) or [Citizens Information](#) if they are studying in Ireland), or to the partner university for validated provision, the time limit for doing so, and where to access further guidance.
141. If the escalation has been upheld, (the Academic Registrar may overturn the appeal handler's original decision), the student will be informed in writing (within **20 working days**), with an explanation of how and when any remedy will be implemented.
142. If the escalation is upheld a COP letter may be issued if requested by the student but will not be issued otherwise.

Record keeping

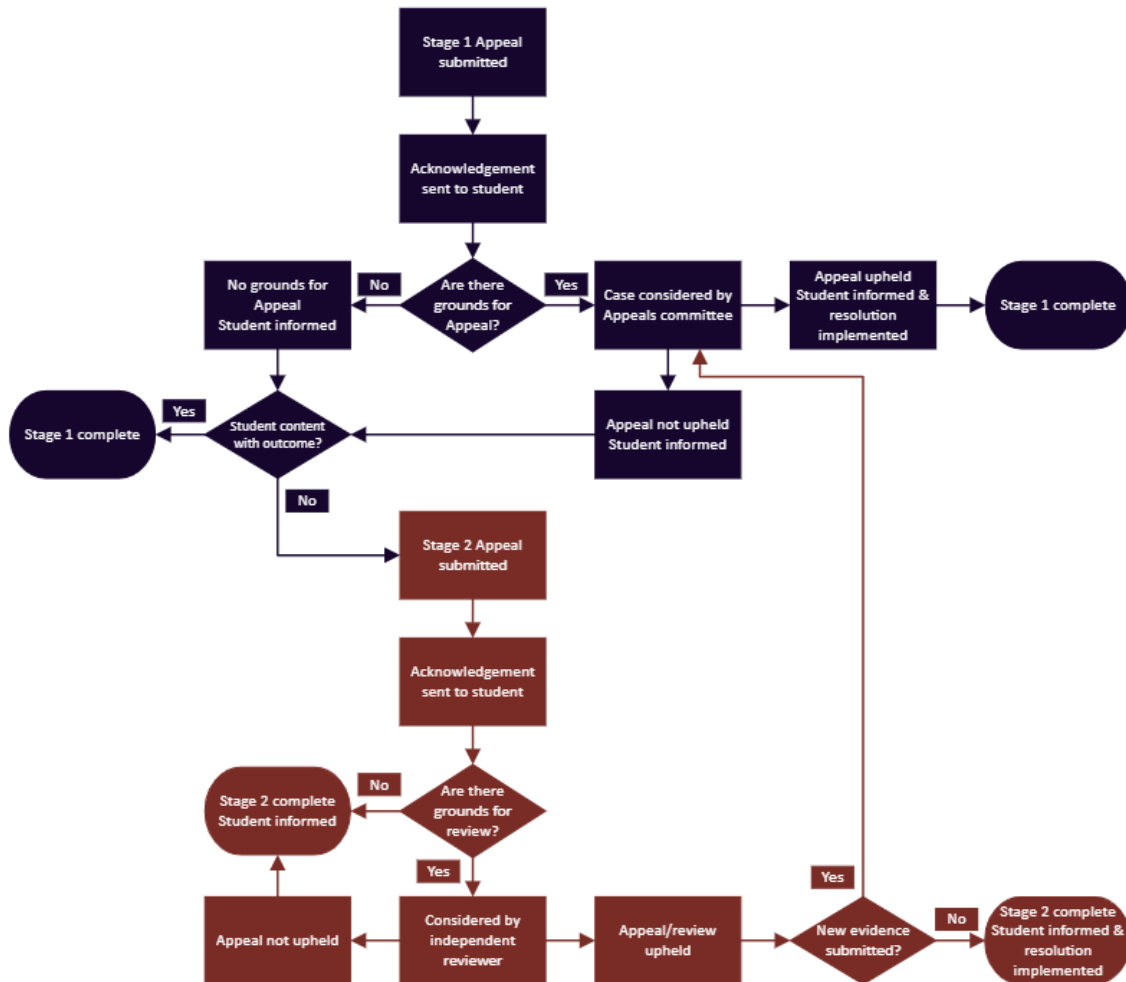
143. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office should keep a full record of every escalation including all relevant completed forms, details of any discussions with the student/relevant members of staff, and relevant email exchanges or other written communication. This information may be required for any future investigation.
144. Upon completion of the escalation, the Academic Registrar should provide the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office with the full case file in order for it to be stored securely and to make all relevant updates to the central log.

Appendix A – Process flowcharts

Appendix Ai – Internal Complaints process flowchart



Appendix Aii – Internal Appeals process flowchart



Appendix B - Complaint & Appeal forms

Appendix Bi - Stage 2 Student Complaint form

This form should be used by students who are dissatisfied with the level of service provided by Study Group through its network of International Study Centres/International College (ISCs) or Study Group Digital Learning (SGDL). You should, in the first instance, raise any concern or complaint with your Personal Tutor (or other member of ISC or SGDL staff). Hopefully your concern can then be resolved quickly and easily. However, if you have not got a satisfactory resolution at this stage of the complaints process, you can escalate your concern using this form. We ask you to read the Student Complaints & Appeals Policy (available from the ISC/SGDL student support team) before submitting this form so that you are aware of the process and the different outcomes that can be reached.

This form has been designed to be completed electronically. However, should you wish to complete the form by hand, please print it on plain white paper and complete the sections using a black pen.

Once you have completed this form, please submit it (together with your supporting evidence) to the Administration Office at your ISC or to the SGDL student support team.

Part 1: Your details

Full name	
Click or tap here to enter text.	
Correspondence address	
Click or tap here to enter text.	
Email address	Phone number
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Student number	
Click or tap here to enter text.	
Programme/course of study	
Click or tap here to enter text.	
Date form submitted	
Click or tap to enter a date.	

Part 2: Details of your representative (if applicable)

If you wish to make a formal (stage 2) complaint but feel unable to act on your own, you may appoint a representative to act on your behalf. **However, you must still sign this form yourself.** Once you have decided to have a representative we will correspond with that person. If you change your mind about having a representative, you will need to notify us in writing.

Please check the box if you wish to appoint a representative and include their details below:

- I confirm that I wish the person named below to act on my behalf**

Representative's full name

Click or tap here to enter text.

Representative's email address

Click or tap here to enter text.

Representative's phone number

Click or tap here to enter text.

Part 3: Details of your complaint

When completing this section please include details of why you wish to make a formal complaint and any actions you have already taken regarding the complaint. If you have attempted to resolve the issue informally, please provide details of any members of staff you have spoken to (e.g. Head of Centre). Alternatively, if you feel the complaint cannot be resolved by the early resolution part of the process, please explain why.

Click or tap here to enter text.

Part 4: Desired outcome

Please explain what you are looking for to be satisfied that your complaint has been addressed and/or resolved:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Please indicate if you would be willing to consider mediation or conciliation:

- Yes** *I would be willing to consider mediation or conciliation*
- No** *I would not be willing to consider medication or conciliation*

Part 5: Declaration

I confirm that I have read the Student Complaints & Appeals Policy and I hereby declare that, to the best of my knowledge, the information I have provided is true and correct. I also understand that any wilful dishonesty may lead to disciplinary action.

Student signature

Click or tap here to enter text.

Date

Click or tap to enter a date.

Appendix Bii - Stage 3 Student Complaint form

This form should be used by students who remain dissatisfied with the outcome of their stage 2 formal complaint and who wish to escalate the matter for further consideration. We ask you to read the Student Complaints & Appeals Policy (available from the ISC/SGDL student support team) before submitting this form so that you are aware of the process and the different outcomes that can be reached. We also strongly advise you to consult your Personal Tutor (or other member of ISC or SGDL staff) prior to submitting this form to ensure you have all the relevant advice and guidance regarding this issue.

This form has been designed to be completed electronically. However, should you wish to complete the form by hand, please print it on plain white paper and complete the sections using a black pen.

Once you have completed this form please submit it, along with copies of the following documents, to the [Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office](#)

- your stage 2 student complaint form;**
- the supporting evidence you submitted at stage 2;**
- any new supporting evidence (*optional*); and**
- your stage 2 complaint outcome letter.**

Your stage 3 complaint should be sent **no later than 10 days after the date of your stage 2 complaint outcome letter** as complaints received after the deadline may not be considered.

Part 1: Your details

Full name	
Click or tap here to enter text.	
Correspondence address	
Click or tap here to enter text.	
Email address	Phone number
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Student number	
Click or tap here to enter text.	
Programme/course of study	
Click or tap here to enter text.	
Date form submitted	
Click or tap to enter a date.	

Part 2: Details of your representative (if applicable)

If you wish to make a stage 3 complaint but feel unable to act on your own you may appoint a representative to act on your behalf. **However, you must still sign this form yourself.** Once

you have decided to have a representative we will correspond with that person. If you change your mind about having a representative, you will need to notify us in writing.

Please check the box if you wish to appoint a representative and include their details below:

I confirm that I wish the person named below to act on my behalf

Representative's full name	
Click or tap here to enter text.	
Representative's email address	Representative's phone number
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.

Part 3: Grounds for stage 3 complaint

Below are the reasons that can lead to a stage 3 complaint being considered, please tick which apply in your case. It is important that you only tick those options which you have reason and evidence for:

- A breach of the procedures set out in this Complaints & Appeals Policy.**
- Clear feedback was not provided to explain why the complaint was not upheld at an earlier stage.**
- Bias or prejudice on the part of those who considered the complaint during an earlier stage.**
- A consideration of whether the outcome was reasonable in the circumstances.**
- New material evidence which you were unable, for valid reasons, to provide at an earlier stage.**

<i>Please explain in more detail the reason(s) why you feel you have grounds for a stage 3 complaint</i>
Click or tap here to enter text.

Part 4: Desired outcome

<i>Please explain what you are looking for to be satisfied that your complaint has been addressed and/or resolved:</i>
Click or tap here to enter text.

Please indicate if you would be willing to consider mediation or conciliation:

- Yes** *I would be willing to consider mediation or conciliation*
- No** *I would not be willing to consider medication or conciliation*

Part 5: Declaration

I confirm that I have read the Student Complaints & Appeals Policy and I hereby declare that, to the best of my knowledge, the information I have provided is true and correct. I also understand that any wilful dishonesty may lead to disciplinary action.

Student signature

Click or tap here to enter text.

Date

Click or tap to enter a date.

Appendix Biii - Stage 1 Student Appeal form

This form should be used by students who feel that an academic process has not been followed or where there is a grievance on academic grounds. Appeals can also be made against decisions made by Academic Misconduct Panels and mitigating/extenuating/ personal circumstances outcomes. **However, appeals against academic judgement will not be considered.** You should, in the first instance raise any concern with your Personal Tutor (or other member of ISC or SGDL staff). Hopefully your concern can then be resolved quickly and easily. However, if you have not got a satisfactory resolution, you can use this form to make an appeal. We ask you to read the Student Complaints & Appeals Policy (available from the ISC/SGDL student support team) before submitting this form so that you are aware of the process and the different outcomes that can be reached.

This form has been designed to be completed electronically. However, should you wish to complete the form by hand, please print it on plain white paper and complete the sections using a black pen.

Once you have completed this form, please submit it (together with your supporting evidence) to the Administration Office at your ISC or to the SGDL student support team. **This needs to be done within 10 working days of the issuance of your Record of Results or outcome.**

Appeals received after the deadline may not be considered.

Part 1: Your details

Full name	
Click or tap here to enter text.	
Correspondence address	
Click or tap here to enter text.	
Email address	Phone number
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Student number	
Click or tap here to enter text.	
Programme/course of study	
Click or tap here to enter text.	
Date form submitted	
Click or tap to enter a date.	
Decision appealed against	
Click or tap here to enter text.	

Part 2: Grounds for appeal

Below are the reasons that can lead to an appeal being considered; please tick which apply in your case. It is important that you only tick the grounds you have reason and evidence for.

- A procedural irregularity in the assessment process or in the consideration of a mitigating/extenuating/personal circumstances claim or Academic Misconduct Panel case.**
- Inadequate assessment, prejudice or bias on the part of the examiners or the members of staff considering a mitigating/extenuating/personal circumstances claim or Academic Misconduct Panel case.**
- Medical, personal or other circumstances which affected your performance of which the examiners were not aware of at the time of assessment.**
- An unreasonable outcome (only for appeals against Academic Misconduct Panel decisions).**

A procedural irregularity can include alleged administrative errors which could have led the assessment board to reach a different conclusion had the error not been made.

Please explain in more detail the reason(s) why you feel you have grounds for appeal

Click or tap here to enter text.

Part 3: Desired outcome

Please explain what you are looking for to be satisfied that your appeal has been addressed and/or resolved:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Part 4: Declaration

I confirm that I have read the Student Complaints & Appeals Policy and I hereby declare that, to the best of my knowledge, the information I have provided is true and correct. I also understand that any wilful dishonesty may lead to disciplinary action.

Student signature

Click or tap here to enter text.

Date

Click or tap to enter a date.

Appendix Biv – Stage 2 Student Appeal form

This form should be used by students who remain dissatisfied with the outcome of their stage 1 appeal and wish to escalate the matter for further consideration. We ask you to read the Student Complaints & Appeals Policy (available from the ISC/SGDL student support team) before submitting this form so that you are aware of the process and the different outcomes that can be reached. We also strongly advise you to consult your Personal Tutor (or other member of ISC or SGDL staff) prior to submitting this form to ensure you have all the relevant advice and guidance regarding this issue.

This form has been designed to be completed electronically. However, should you wish to complete the form by hand, please print it on plain white paper and complete the sections using a black pen.

Once you have completed this form please submit it, along with copies of the following documents, to the [Quality Assurance and Enhancement Office](#)

- your stage 1 student appeal form;**
- the supporting evidence you submitted at stage 1;**
- any new supporting evidence (*optional*); and**
- your stage 1 appeal outcome letter.**

Your stage 2 appeal should be sent **no later than 10 days after the date of your stage 1 appeal outcome letter** as appeals received after the deadline may not be considered.

Part 1: Your details

Full name	
Click or tap here to enter text.	
Correspondence address	
Click or tap here to enter text.	
Email address	Phone number
Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Student number	
Click or tap here to enter text.	
Programme/course of study	
Click or tap here to enter text.	
Date form submitted	
Click or tap to enter a date.	
Decision appealed against	
Click or tap here to enter text.	

Part 2: Grounds for stage 2 appeal

Below are the reasons that can lead to a stage 2 appeal being considered, please tick which apply in your case. It is important that you only tick those options which you have reason and evidence for:

- New material evidence which you were unable, for valid reasons, to provide at an earlier stage.**
- Bias or prejudice on the part of those who dealt with the appeal at the Appeals Panel.**
- A consideration of whether the outcome was reasonable in the circumstances.**
- A breach by the Appeals Panel of the procedure set out in the Student Complaints & Appeals Policy.**

Please explain in more detail the reason(s) why you feel you have grounds for a stage 2 appeal

Click or tap here to enter text.

Part 3: Desired outcome

Please explain what you are looking for to be satisfied that your appeal has been addressed and/or resolved:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Part 4: Declaration

I confirm that I have read the Student Complaints & Appeals Policy and I hereby declare that, to the best of my knowledge, the information I have provided is true and correct. I also understand that any wilful dishonesty may lead to disciplinary action.

Student signature

Click or tap here to enter text.

Date

Click or tap to enter a date.



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Version	1.5
Date	August 2023
Author	Jessica Jetmore, Senior Quality Officer
Owner	Academic Board