UCD Assessment Appeals Policy and Procedures

Policy Owner:
Student Engagement, Conduct, Complaints and Appeals

Approval date and body:
Academic Council, April 2021

---

1. Purpose

UCD is committed to providing an excellent education and student experience. The University supports improvement in educational quality and academic decision-making. However, the University recognises that from time to time situations arise when a student considers that they might have grounds for appeal against a decision related to assessment of their academic work. The Assessment Appeals Policy outlines the principles and process for such an appeal. The University is committed to resolving appeals as quickly as possible with emphasis on local resolution.

2. Definitions

An assessment appeal is a request for a formal review, on specific grounds, of a decision of an academic body charged with making decisions concerning student assessment, progression or award.

3. Scope

3.1 Appellants

The Assessment Appeals Policy applies to all registered students, including students registered to collaborative programmes, and graduands.

An appeal can be submitted collectively by a group of students. In cases where an appeal has been submitted by a group of students the appeal will be considered as a single submission and all students should be in agreement of the grounds and evidence for the appeal.

3.2 Types of appeal

An appeal is a request for a formal review of a decision of an academic body charged with making decisions concerning student assessment, progression or award. Decisions that can be appealed under the Assessment Appeals Policy are limited to:

- An appeal against the result of any assessment of students' academic work. An appeal against the result of a module can only be submitted against a final result, including an appeal against a component of a module.

- An appeal against the decision of the Academic Council Committee on Examinations on the award of a Research Master's Degree.

- An appeal against decisions on progression in and award of doctoral programmes. A student can appeal the decision of

i. The Transfer Assessment Panel or
ii. The decision of the Academic Council Committee on Examinations on the award.

3.3 Grounds for Appeal

An assessment appeal will only be considered on the following grounds:

- Procedural irregularity – there is evidence that the procedures relating to an assessment decision were not followed properly, which may have impacted on the decision.

- Retrospective application for Certified Additional Considerations (taught modules) – where a retrospective application was rejected because the reason for lateness was deemed invalid by the Governing Board.

3.4 Appeals that do not meet any of the above grounds will not be accepted. Students cannot appeal simply because they are unhappy with a grade awarded or other academic judgement exercised.

Academic judgment is a judgment that is made about a matter where the opinion of an academic expert is essential. Therefore, in the context of UCD's assessment appeals process, academic judgement includes, but is not restricted to, decisions regarding the assessment strategy used, the structure and content of the assessment, assessment feedback, the grade awarded, and the academic standard attained.

An appeal is distinct from a complaint that seeks to raise concerns over the quality of a function, unit or a service provided by the University. Such complaints should be addressed through the Student Complaint Policy and Procedures.

3.5 It is acknowledged that issues raised by students under this process may be complex or multifaceted, and more than one university process may be applicable. Students will be guided on which policies and processes are appropriate for addressing the substantive matters they wish to raise, and may be sign-posted to an alternative process.

Where a student initiates more than one process to address interconnected issues, the Registrar, or their nominee, may decide which process should take priority, or is most appropriate for the substantive issue raised. This may require the pausing of one process while another proceeds. Decisions will be made in consultation with named decision-makers under other university policies and processes as appropriate. In exceptional circumstances, the Registrar, or their nominee, may direct that a single investigation process is undertaken to allow the issues raised to be addressed holistically and comprehensively.

Students will be kept informed of such decisions, including the sequencing of processes and impacts on relevant timelines.

If a decision is made under one policy or process, the information or material used to make that decision may also be used when considering the same substantive issues under a different policy or process.

4. Principles

The following principles underpin the Assessment Appeals Policy and appeals process:

- Accessible and user-focused – Easily available and understood, transparent process where outcomes are communicated giving clear reasons for the decisions reached.
- Simple and timely – Offer opportunities for early resolution avoiding unnecessarily cumbersome and lengthy stages of the process.
- Robust and fair – Support constructive engagement applying principles of natural justice and promote students' confidence in the process by giving students opportunity to voice their concerns in writing and in person as appropriate, giving equal access for all parties to all the evidence and treating all documentation confidentially.
- Supports improvement – Appeals provide an important source of feedback for the University, which contributes to the enhancement of the quality of learning and to the improvement of the Assessment Appeals Policy and process.

5. Roles and responsibilities

5.4 All Faculty and Staff

All faculty and staff responsible for assessment should be aware of the University's Assessment Appeals Policy and process. As the majority of assessment queries are likely to be dealt with locally within the School, faculty and staff should be appropriately prepared to respond to queries.

5.5 Students

Students should:

- Ensure that they are familiar with the content of any relevant University Regulations, Policy, Procedures and Code of Practice on the assessment of their work, seeking feedback or

submitting an appeal on the assessment of their work;
- Seek feedback from the relevant assessor;
- Prepare and provide sufficient evidence to support their appeal; and
- Take all necessary actions in regard to progressing in their studies in case the appeal is not successful.

5.6 Assessor

Assessors, such as module coordinators, examiners and supervisors, should:
- Facilitate timely feedback on assessment results;
- Inform students of clear assessment criteria, and the manner in which students may obtain feedback on their results, including arrangements around the viewing of examination scripts following the release of final module results; and

Ensure a request to amend a student record is actioned as quickly as possible should an administrative error be discovered.

5.7 Head of School

Responsibility for dealing with student queries in relation to feedback and assessment results lies with the Head of School. The Head of School should ensure that:
- Feedback on assessment is provided according to the specification in the module descriptor and no later than twenty working days after the deadline for submission of each piece of assessed work, excepting work submitted late or submitted as part of the final assessment component of the module
- Module Coordinators are aware of the regulations governing student assessment. Support is available to students who wish to raise concerns; and
- Faculty and staff within the School engage with the appeals process and respond to appeals, when formal appeals are made against assessment results.

5.8 Assessment Appeals Officer

The Assessment Appeals Officer:
- Manages formal assessment appeals
- Provides procedural advice to students wishing to submit an appeal and to faculty and staff responding to appeals;
- Ensures that appeals submitted include necessary details and supporting evidence;
- Liaises and communicates with students, Schools and the Student Appeals Committee;
- Ensures a case record is maintained; and
- Escalates any observations on the process highlighted by the Student Appeals Committee; and produces information and reports to the Academic Council Committee on Student Appeals and Complaints.
- Determine whether appeals fall within the scope of the policy and reject submissions in accordance with 6.2.

5.9 Assessment, UCD Registry

Assessment have a key role in implementing the final decisions on assessment appeals. Assessment also support the Academic Council Committee for Examinations.
Assessment should:

- Provide final results to students on published dates;
- Update student records in a timely manner following a valid request for amendment; and
- Advise students on any amendment to results once implemented.

5.10 Relevant University decision-making bodies

The University decision-making bodies responsible for the decisions that can be appealed under this policy include:

- Programme Examination Boards approve final grades across modules and these grades are published as final results.
- Graduate School Boards approve the decisions of Transfer Assessment Panels.
- The Academic Council Committee on Examinations (ACCE) awards, on behalf of the University, for all research degrees.

5.11 Student Appeals Committee

The Student Appeals Committee is the final arbiter in formal assessment appeals cases. The Committee should:

- Consider appeals transparently and independently; and
- Communicate its decisions in a timely and clear manner to students, Schools, and other university members.

5.12 Academic Council Committee on Student Appeals and Complaints (ACCSAC)

In relation to assessment appeals the Academic Council Committee Student Appeals and Complaints Committee will:

- Provide oversight of the application of the Assessment Appeals Policy and procedure
- Make recommendations for the enhancement of the Assessment Appeals Policy and procedure
- Report to Academic Council annually.

6. UCD Assessment Appeals Procedure

The University encourages students, faculty and staff to resolve matters as close as possible to the level they arise. Only when such channels have been exhausted will formal appeals procedures apply.

6.1 Early resolution

The Head of School should ensure that the School has a timely feedback process in place. The School should provide an appropriate contact person who is available to students for the purpose of feedback and keep an appropriate record of any matters that arise. The School should complete this process as soon as possible after the publication of the final results.

If the School fails to accommodate students' queries or students are not satisfied with the feedback and/or resolution provided by the School, and they have stated grounds for initiating an appeal, they may submit a formal appeal to the Assessment Appeals Officer. Students registered to graduate research programmes receive informal and formal feedback in advance of final examination and results. They may submit a formal appeal to the Assessment Appeals Officer directly after the publication of the final results.

6.2 The process for submitting a formal assessment appeal

Appeals should be submitted to the Assessment Appeals Officer using the appropriate form provided within **10 working days** of receiving the final result of an assessment[1]. It is recognised that in exceptional circumstances a student may not meet the stated timeframe. In such exceptional circumstances the Appeals Officer may allow the submission of an appeal outside the stated timeframe. Such submissions will be considered on a case by case basis. The decision of the Assessment Appeals Officer on such cases is final.

The submission should include all supporting evidence to be presented to the Student Appeals Committee in support of the appeal. It is the onus of the student to submit the necessary information and evidence to the Committee. A student cannot submit further evidence at a later stage, unless requested by the Student Appeals Committee. If the submission is deemed incomplete by the Assessment Appeals Officer, the student is advised that they can submit a new appeal once the documentation is complete.

A submission can be deemed ineligible by the Appeals Officer if the submission

- does not fall within the scope (section 3);
- clearly does not meet any of the grounds for appeal (section 3.3);
- does not provide necessary evidence to support the appeal; or
- is not submitted within the given timeframe.

The appellant should note that:

- A student (or group of students) can withdraw from the appeals process at any point before the final decision of the Student Appeals Committee.
- If a result that contributes to the calculation of a final degree classification is appealed, a student's graduation will be postponed pending the outcome of the appeal.
- Disciplinary actions may be taken against a student who submits false or vexatious material as part of their appeal.

[1] A final result is a result ratified by the relevant Governing Board.

6.3 Response to appeal (Taught Programmes)

The School will be notified of the appeal as soon as possible, no later than **5 working days** from the submission of the appeal. The School's response to an appeal should be normally submitted within **10 working days** of the date of notification of the appeal. The response should be given in writing, and address all pertinent issues raised by the student. The School should provide all relevant evidence to support their response. The student (or students) will receive a copy of the response and may provide a further response within **5 working days** to inform the review of the appeal by the Student Appeals Committee.

6.4 Response to appeal (Research Degrees)

For appeals against the decision of the Academic Council Committee on Examinations (ACCE), the Chair of the ACCE, the Head of the School and members of the Research Degree Examination Committee will be notified of the appeal as soon as possible, no later than **5 working days** from the submission of the appeal.

For appeals against the decision of the Governing Board regarding a Doctoral Programme Stage Transfer Assessment, the Chair of the Governing Board, the Head of the School and members of the Assessment Panel will be notified of the appeal as soon as possible, no later than **5 working days** from the submission of the appeal.

The response to an appeal should be normally submitted within **10 working days** of the date of notification of the appeal. The response should be given in writing, and address all pertinent issues raised by the student. All relevant evidence to support the response should be provided. The student (or students) will receive a copy of the response and may provide a further response within **5 working days** to inform the review of the appeal by the Student Appeals Committee.

6.5 Review of an appeal by the Student Appeals Committee

The Student Appeals Committee will be drawn from a standing panel of assessors and comprise of at least **3 members** of faculty, one of whom will be appointed as chairperson. The composition of the Committee should respect balance between gender and disciplines. The Committee will only review what has been submitted by the student and the School, based on the grounds for appeal stated by the student and addressing all issues raised by the student. The Committee will normally reach a conclusion by simple majority in one meeting within **30 working days** of the formal submission of an appeal. The Appeals Officer should keep an official record of the Committee conclusion.

6.6 Outcomes of formal assessment appeal process

The purpose of the Student Appeals Committee is to determine whether or not fair procedures were followed in the assessment process and whether or not a fair outcome was reached in the circumstances pertaining to a student. It is not the function of the Committee to reassess the student's work.

The determination of the Student Appeals Committee will be given in writing no later than **5 working days** after the Committee has reached a decision. The determination of the Student Appeals Committee is final and cannot be appealed further within the University.

The Student Appeals Committee may:

- Uphold the appeal and instruct the relevant Governing Board or the Academic Council Committee for

Examinations (ACCE) on the decision based on evidence of the irregularity of the assessment process or a valid retrospective application for Certified Additional Considerations.. The implementation of the decision is the responsibility of the relevant Chair of the Governing Board in consultation with the relevant examiner.

- Not uphold the appeal and confirm the original decision.

6.7. Complaint to the Office of the Ombudsman

If a student is not satisfied with the University appeals process, they can submit a complaint to the Office of the Ombudsman.

7. Related Documents

- Student Appeals Procedure
- Academic Regulations
- Assessment Code of Practice
- Additional Considerations for Assessment Policy
- Policy on Progression in Doctoral Programmes
- Policy on Theses in Graduate Research Programmes

8. Version History

Version	Date	Approval
1	05/05/2016	Approved by Academic Council
2	23/05/2016	Minor amendments approved by ACEC
3	25/05/2019	Amendments proposed by ACCSAC and approved by Academic Council
4	November 2019	Changes in line with the Student Appeals Procedure. Approved by Academic Council
5	23/04/2020	Minor amendments made to comply with the Student Appeals Procedure. Approved by ACEC
6	22/04/2021	Inclusion of definition of academic judgement. Approved by Academic Council
7	30/03/2026	Amendments approved by ACCSAC to reflect the new Additional Considerations policy and in relation to 3.5