



### Senate

<b>Paper title</b>	Annual report on academic appeals submitted under the QMUL Appeal Regulations 2014/15.
<b>Outcome requested</b>	Senate is asked to consider the report.
<b>Points to note and further information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The paper provides statistics and data on academic appeals received during the 2014/15 academic year.</li><li>• The report also provides an equality impact analysis of the cases by ethnicity, gender and fee status.</li></ul>
<b>Questions to consider</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• is Senate content that cases are being handled in a satisfactory manner?</li><li>• are there any areas of concern?</li><li>• are there any opportunities for enhancement?</li><li>• are there any issues relating to the report that members would wish to highlight to Council?</li></ul>
<b>Regulatory/statutory reference points</b>	This report has been produced to enable Queen Mary to monitor and evaluate the appeals process and to provide commentary for enhancement purposes.
<b>Strategy and risk</b>	<p>The appeal process helps manage institutional risk by identifying areas of Queen Mary provision that may require improvement.</p> <p>Effective handling of appeals is crucial to the student experience and can correct issues that have not been resolved at an earlier stage thereby protecting students and the reputation of the institution.</p>
<b>Reporting/consideration route for the paper</b>	EQB considered this paper on 16 February 2016. Council will receive this report at its meeting of 05 April 2016.
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## Annual report on academic appeals - 2014/15

### Scope

1. This is the annual report on academic appeal cases submitted by students during the 2014/15 academic year. Academic appeals are appeals against progression, assessment or award.

### Number of cases received

2. In total 237 academic appeals were submitted in 2014/15. This is 36 more cases than were received in 2013/14, representing a substantial increase of 17.9% on the previous year. The total number of appeals received compares with previous years as follows:

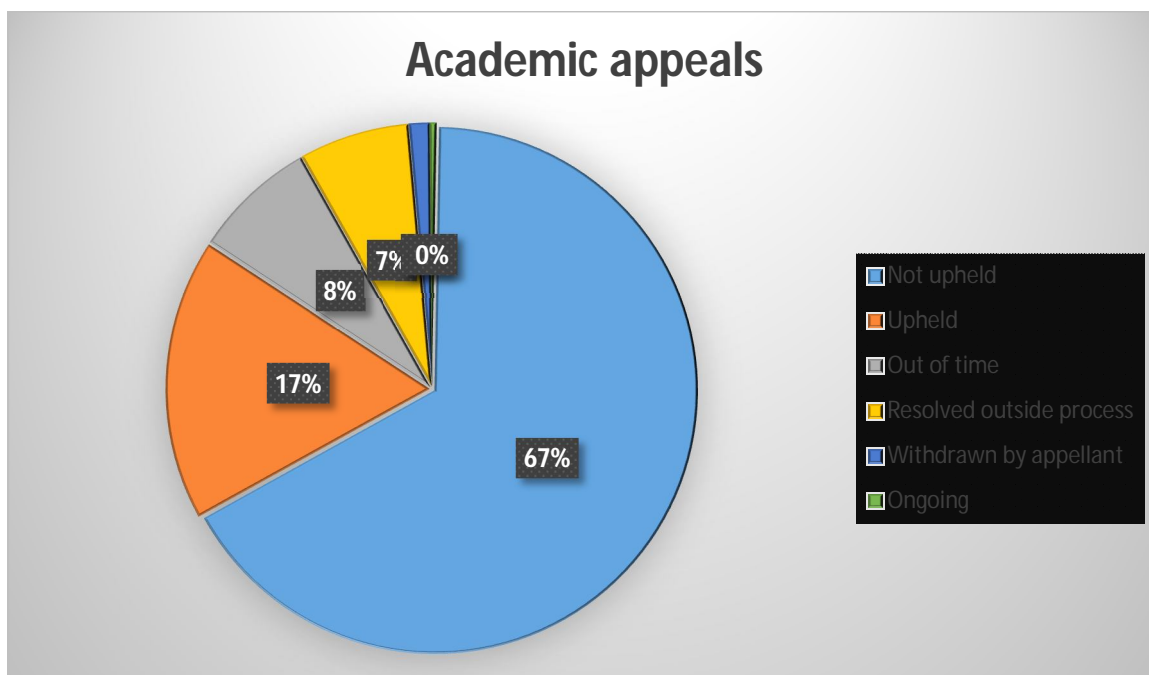
#### Number of academic appeals received

Year	Number of appeals	% change	Student population	Number of appeals as % of student population
2010/11	214	+56.2	16,919	1.27
2011/12	178	-16.8	17,226	1.03
2012/13	163	-9.0	17,840	0.91
2013/14	201	+18.9	18768	1.1
<b>2014/15</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>+17.9</b>	<b>18905</b>	<b>1.25</b>

3. 2014/15 represented the highest total number of academics appeals ever received at QMUL and the number of appeals has increased significantly in each of the last 2 academic years. However as a % of the total QMUL student population the figure is only just over 1%.
4. The table and chart below show the outcome for appeals received in 2014/15.

Outcome	Number of cases (2013/14 figures in brackets)
Not upheld	<b>158</b> (103)
Upheld	41 (49)
Resolved outside process	16 (11)
Out of time	18 (19)
Ongoing	1 (13)

Withdrawn by appellant	3 (6)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>237</b>



5. The percentage of cases upheld in 2014/15 was 17% of the total received. This compares with 24% of cases upheld in 2013/14. While there was an increase in academic appeals, fewer cases were upheld.
6. The % of cases upheld had risen in previous years which in part reflected external guidance from the OIA on how to handle cases that involved students who were diagnosed with a disability after they had failed.

#### Grounds for appeal

7. In accordance with the 2014/15 Appeal Regulations there are two grounds for appeal:
  - i. Procedural error where the process leading to the decision being appealed against was not conducted in accordance with QMUL's procedure, such that there is reasonable doubt as to whether the outcome might have been different had the error not occurred. Procedural error includes alleged administrative/clerical error and bias in the operation of the procedure.
  - ii. That exceptional circumstances, illness or other relevant factors had, for good reason, not been made known at the time or had not been taken into account properly.

*QMUL Appeal Regulations 2014/15, 2.148*

8. Of the 237 appeals received in the 2014/15 academic year, 66 (48 in 2013/14) were submitted on the grounds of i. procedural error, 130 (128 in 2013/14) were submitted

on the grounds of ii. exceptional circumstances and 41 (25 in 2013/14) were submitted on both grounds.

### **Appeals submitted under i) procedural error**

9. Of the 66 appeals submitted under procedural error, 7 were upheld, 47 were not upheld, 7 were resolved outside the process, 2 were withdrawn, and 2 were deemed out of time. 1 case is pending an outcome.
10. Where students submitted requests on the grounds of i. procedural error, the key themes of the appeals were:
  - Challenging marks awarded for particular modules/examinations based on the applicant's belief that these had been miscalculated;
  - Challenging degree classifications based on the applicant's belief that they should have been awarded a higher classification.
11. The procedural errors that led to the appeals being upheld included:
  - Lack of a marking trail
  - Late work penalties being incorrectly imposed
  - Students being able to progress when they had not achieved sufficient credit

### **Appeals submitted under ii) Exceptional circumstances**

12. Of the 130 appeals submitted on the grounds of exceptional circumstances, 86 cases were not upheld, 26 cases were upheld, 8 cases were resolved outside the process, 9 cases were rejected because they were submitted outside of the 14-day deadline, and 1 case was withdrawn by the student.
13. Where students submitted appeals on the grounds of ii) exceptional circumstances, the common themes of the appeals were as follows:
  - Assessments affected by a health condition that the student had not made known at the time – in a number of cases mental health conditions such as anxiety and/or depression;
  - Diagnosis of a specific learning difficulty during or shortly after the exam period or after deregistration.
14. The majority of cases submitted on the grounds of exceptional circumstances relate to claims that examinations had been affected by ill health. By sitting exams students declare themselves fit to sit, in accordance with the 'fit to sit' policy, which states: "in attending an examination, students declare themselves 'fit to sit'. Any subsequent claim for extenuating circumstances shall not normally be considered". In most cases applicants did not provide clear evidence of a good reason why they had not disclosed these circumstances to the examination board at the appropriate time.
15. There was also an increase in the number of cases that involved a student being diagnosed with depression, which may be classified as a disability, while a student at QMUL. These cases are often complex and the OIA has recommended that QMUL deal with such cases with care, in the context of the Equality Act (2010).

### **Appeals submitted under both i) Procedural error *and* ii) Exceptional circumstances**

16. Of the 41 cases submitted under both grounds, 25 were not upheld, 8 were upheld, 7 cases were deemed out of time and 1 case was resolved outside of the process.
17. Appeals submitted on both grounds are combinations of the factors listed above under the individual grounds and do not have any specific features that distinguish them. They can be more complex as they may involve more factors than appeals submitted on a single ground.

### Appeals by Developmental Year

18. The tables below provide data on the number of appeals received, by level of study and by developmental year.

**Number of academic appeals, by level of study 2014/15**  
(previous year's figures in brackets)

Level of study	Number of appeals received	% of all appeals (to one decimal place)
Undergraduate and foundation	160 (169)	67.5 (84)
Postgraduate taught	75 (31)	31.6 (15.5)
Postgraduate research	2 (1)	0.8 (0.5)

**Number of academic appeals, by developmental year**  
(previous year's figures in brackets)

	Number of appeals received	% of all appeals (to one decimal place)
Foundation (Year 0)	5 (0)	2.1% (0%)
UG year 1	54 (36)	22.8% (18%)
UG year 2	42 (52)	17.8% (26%)
UG final year	52 (70)	21.9% (35%)
UG year 3 (of 4 or 5)	4 (6)	1.7% (3%)
UG year 4 (of 5)	3 (5)	1.3% (2%)
PGT	75 (31)	31.6% (15.5%)
PGR	2 (1)	0.8% (0.5%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>237</b>	

19. Undergraduate students represent the largest number of appeals. Final year students are more likely to appeal as degree classification is one of the things students are often dissatisfied with.
20. Research student appeals are proportionally low; postgraduate research students make up about 7% of the student population. Complaints from research students have also decreased in recent years, indicating this may be the result of closer monitoring of supervision.
21. Appeals from postgraduate taught students have doubled in 2014/15. Postgraduate Taught students make up 18.6% of the total student population at Queen Mary, so

the number of postgraduate taught appeals was disproportionate in 2014/15. Part of the rise appears to be a perception from students of a lack of feedback, particularly when student marks fall below their expectations.

## Appeals by School

22. The tables below show the number of appeals by School by total number of appeals received and the number of appeals as a % of the School's total population.
23. In terms of total number of appeals the most were received from the Institute of Health Sciences Education (MBBS students), Electronic Engineering and Computer Science and Mathematical Sciences. These Schools/Institutes also had the most number of appeals in 2013/14.

### Academic appeals by School – as % of all appeals received

Ranking	School	Total number of appeals	% of all appeals
1	IHSE	31 (36)	15
2	Electronic Engineering & Computer Science (excluding BUPT students)	25 (29)	11
3	Mathematical Sciences	23 (33)	10
4	Biological & Chemical Sciences	20 (10)	8
5	Economics and Finance	20 (12)	8
=6	Business and Management	17 (11)	7
=6	Engineering & Materials Science	17 (9)	7
=8	CCLS	15 (4)	6
=8	Law	15 (21)	6
10	Politics & International Relations	11 (3)	5
11	English and Drama	8 (11)	3
12	Physics and Astronomy	7 (5)	3
13	Languages, Linguistics and Film	7 (8)	3
14	History	4 (4)	2
15	Cancer	3	1
16	Geography	3	1
17	William Harvey	3	1
18	Wolfson	2	1
		<b>237</b>	

## Timescales

24. The QMUL Appeal Regulations 2014/15 state that students will be notified of the outcome of their appeal application within 2 calendar months from the receipt of the submission of supporting evidence.
25. All students are notified if the deadline is reached and informed that their case is still

under consideration and the expected timescale for completion.

26. The mean time taken to resolve a case for 2014/15 was 47.4 calendar days (41.8 calendar days in 2013/14); the median for 2014/15 was 44 calendar days (41 in 2013/14). The table below provides a breakdown of the number of cases under/over the two months specified by the regulations.

#### Time taken to resolve cases

	2014/15	2013/14
Number of cases under two calendar months	182 (76.8%)	154 (77%)
Number of cases over two calendar months	54 (22.8%)	36 (18%)
Cases open/resolved without appeal	1 (0.4%)	11 (5%)

#### Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education

27. Students who are dissatisfied with the outcome of an appeal may submit a complaint to the OIA. Figures on complaints made to the OIA are reported to Senate separately. From June 2015 students now have 1 calendar year to make a submission to the OIA whereas previously they had to submit within 3 months.

#### Developments for 2015/16 and beyond

28. The Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office is working with the Students' Union on producing some student friendly guidance on the appeal process to improve the information available to students.
29. A key factor that leads to students appealing seems to be a perceived lack of feedback. Schools/Institutes are therefore encouraged to run results surgeries following the main summer and late summer examinations. The purpose of results surgeries is to help students understand their marks, or degree classification. Such surgeries have proved effective at other HE Institutions in managing a rising number of appeal cases as well as contributing to a positive student experience.
30. A Final Review stage has been added to the appeal process for 2015/16 in order to ensure QMUL complies with the recommendations in *The good practice framework for handling complaints and academic appeals*. The Final Review will be undertaken by the Principal's Nominee and for the majority of case it is expected this will be either Jonathan Morgan (Academic Registrar), or Professor Rebecca Lingwood (Vice-Principal).

#### Equality Impact Data

31. Appendix 1 shows the breakdown of academic appeals received by ethnicity and gender. Appendix 2 shows the breakdown of academic appeals received by fee status.

32. The highest number and proportion of appeals were from students who stated their ethnicity as white. This is also the largest ethnic group at QMUL. The second highest number of appeals was from students who stated their ethnicity as Asian-Indian and Asian-Pakistani. No ethnic group is particularly over-represented in the data.
33. The gender split in appeals was 62% male and 38% female. Amongst the largest ethnic group at Queen Mary (White) the split was 47% male, 53% female. For the joint second largest ethnic groups (Asian-Indian and Asian-Pakistani), the gender split was reversed, with 88% of male students and 12% of female students identifying themselves as Asian Indian appealing whilst 60% of male and 40% of female Asian Pakistani students submitted an appeal.
34. 73% of appeals were from students classified as home/EU fee-status. 26.6% from overseas students. These figures are similar to the figures from 2013/14 when 76% of appeals were from Home/EU students and 24% from overseas students. Home/EU students make up about two thirds of Queen Mary Students (64%), so are overrepresented in the academic appeal figures.

#### Appendix 1 – ethnicity and gender

Ethnicity	Number of appeals	Proportion of all appeals (% to one decimal place)	Appeals within ethnic group:	
			Male (%)	Female (%)
Arab	17	7.2%	59	41
Asian – Bangladeshi	15	6.3%	33	67
Asian – Chinese	14	5.9%	43	57
Asian – Indian	23	9.7%	57	43
Asian – Other	24	10.1%	54	46
Asian – Pakistani	26	11%	54	46
Black – African	26	11%	69	31
Black – Caribbean	6	2.5%	17	83
Black – Other	1	0.4%	100	0
Do not know/not given	9	3.8%	56	44
Other	4	1.7%	50	50
Other mixed	6	2.5%	0	100
White	59	24.9%	56	44
White/Asian	4	1.7%	50	50
White/Black	3	1.3%	0	100
<b>Totals</b>	<b>237</b>		<b>52</b>	<b>48</b>

#### Appendix 2 – Academic appeals received, by fee status

Fee Status	Number of appeals	% of total appeals
Home/EU	173	73
Overseas	63	26.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>236 (1unknown)</b>	