



Senate

Paper title	Student Casework Reports 2019-20
Outcome requested	The Senate is asked to consider and comment upon these reports.
Points to note and further information	<p>Three reports on student casework are included for consideration:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Appeals. 2. Academic misconduct. 3. Complaints, disciplinary misconduct, and fitness to practise. <p>ARCS reports annually to the EQSB, the Senate, and the Council on these issues. The reports include the number and type of cases, case outcomes, and turnaround times. Anonymous and aggregated data on cases broken down by gender, ethnicity and fee status is included.</p> <p>The reports detail key themes from the year. The Senate is asked to note the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The percentage of students submitting appeals dropped sharply in 2019-20, almost certainly a result of the contingencies put in place as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic. ARCS anticipates it will see a significant correction following the examination boards to be held in the summer of 2021. 2. The percentage of students alleged to have committed academic misconduct rose sharply, from 1.4% to 2.3%, a 67% year-on-year increase. 3. The number of Stage 2 complaints received in 2019-20 (21) is essentially in line with the number received in 2018-19 (23). There is an increasing tendency for complaints to consist of a complex mixture of academic and non-academic issues. 4. Discipline cases have more than halved, however, their complexity has remained the same, including several allegations involving sexual misconduct and (separately) knife incidents. Queen Mary has retained the services of an independent investigator to investigate sexual misconduct cases. It should be noted that current rates suggest the number of cases will again spike in the 2020-21 academic year, having already exceeded the 2019-20 total. Therefore, there is likely no specific reason for the 2019-20 decrease. 5. Only one fitness to practise hearing took place in 2019-20. 6. There were (and remain) significant delays in the appeals process due to the volume of cases. Staff resource remains at 5.0 FTE following an increase last year; this is welcome, but not sufficient to deal with the volume of cases and it is recommended that Queen Mary look at ways of reducing the case numbers as the means of resolution. The OIA has recently upheld several Queen Mary cases on the basis delay alone (rather than the merit of the case) and has imposed financial penalties; the number of such cases is likely to increase. 7. There have been delays in the development of an electronic case management system, which would aid in the faster resolution of cases and permit much better reporting. ARCS has had preliminary discussions with Tribal, the SITS suppliers, and is also discussing an internally

	<p>constructed system to be used for academic misconduct; it is hoped that rapid progress can be made with both.</p> <p>8. Minor changes to the appeals and academic misconduct policies, and limited but significant changes to the complaints and discipline policies will be presented to the May 2021 meeting of the EQSB.</p>
Questions to consider	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Senate is asked to consider and comment on the report. 2. How can the efficiency of the appeals process be reduced? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. By strengthening the commitment of schools/institutes to local intervention in the first instance – via results surgeries and the like – and by review of the automatic dismissal stage? b. Should the rapid development and deployment of an electronic case management system be deemed an institutional priority? 3. Academic misconduct occurring in assessments counting for 30 per cent or more of a module must be referred for central investigation. Senate and EQSB have previously voiced support for increasing this threshold to allow for more investigations at school/institute level, and further comment within the context of this report is invited. It is noted that the year-on-year increase in 2019-20 of 67% has effectively precluded ARCS from being able to respond to all allegations in a timely fashion; it should be further noted that the figures for 2020-21 appear on track to exceed 2019-20.
Regulatory/statutory reference points	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o With reference to the recent guidance, <i>Talking about Quality - Supporting Student Discussions on Quality, Standards and Value for Money</i>. 2. Office of the Independent Adjudicator: The Good Practice Framework 3. Office for Students: Conditions of Registration – C2
Strategy and risk	<p>Aligns with the Queen Mary Strategy 2030</p> <p>Excellence in Education</p> <p>Excellence in Student Engagement</p> <p>Excellence in Student Employability</p> <p>Excellence in Learning Environment</p>
Reporting/consideration route for the paper	<p>Senate and EQSB to consider.</p> <p>An abridged version of this report will be considered by Senior Executive Team and the Council.</p>
Author	<p>Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office (ARCS)</p>

Student Casework Reports 2019-20

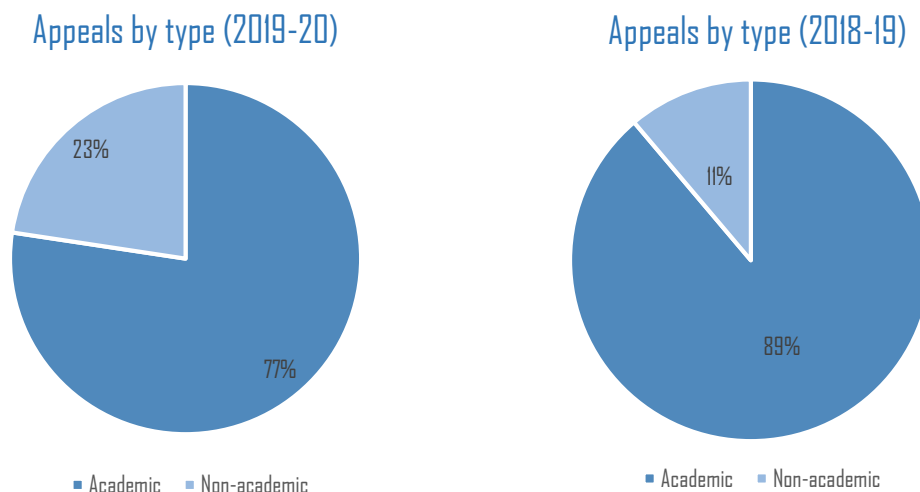
Report 1: Appeals

Scope

- 1.1 This report concerns student appeals received in 2019-20. These have been broken down into academic and non-academic appeals, but all appeals were conducted under the [Appeal Policy](#), under which students could appeal outcomes from the following:
- decisions of examination boards or research degree examination panels on assessment, progression, or award.
 - the Academic Misconduct Policy.
 - decisions to terminate the registration of a student (including research students).
 - the Fitness to Practise and Professional Capability Regulations.
 - the Code of Student Discipline.
 - disciplinary action taken under the Library Regulations.
 - disciplinary action taken under the Halls of Residence Regulations.
 - decisions on student bursaries, scholarships, and grants where these are administered by Queen Mary.
- 1.2 The [Appeal Policy](#) became a standalone document for the first time in 2019-20; previously the appeals process was embedded in the yearly Academic Regulations.

Total case numbers

- 1.3 Queen Mary received 283 appeals in 2019-20, a significant decrease of over forty-two per cent since 2018-19 (492 appeals). The charts below show the breakdown of academic and non-academic appeals in 2019-20 and 2018-19. Academic appeals have decreased and non-academic appeals increased, however, for reasons detailed below it is difficult to read too much into these figures.



- 1.4 This is obviously a startling drop in overall cases, however, it can be explained almost exclusively as another impact of the Covid-19 global pandemic. The contingency measures rightly put in place by Queen Mary from March 2020 onwards meant that a great many students who perhaps would not have progressed or received an awarded have done so, or have deferred their attempts, meaning that far fewer appeals were received. This latter outcome of course means that there is a real possibility that the number of appeals received following the summer 2021 examination boards will reach unprecedented levels.

Year	Appeals	Change	Student body	As % of student body
2014-15	309	(+13.0%)	18,905	1.6%
2015-16	318	+2.9%	21,187	1.5%
2016-17	460	+44.7%	23,114	2.0%
2017-18	483	+5.0%	23,792	2.0%
2018-19	492	+1.9%	25,925	1.9%
2019-20	283	-42.5%	27,120	1.0%

Breakdown of case numbers

Breakdown by category (academic and non-academic appeals)

1.5 Academic appeals relate to academic issues, and generally to examination board decisions (progression, classification, marking, deregistration for failure, etc). These comprise the great majority of cases. Students cannot challenge academic judgement, but many appeals nonetheless attempt to do so. There are no particular trends within this category this year. The number of academic appeals as a proportion of the student body has almost halved, but this is not unexpected given the significant yearly drop.

Academic appeals

Year	Appeals	Change	Student body	As % of student body
2014-15	237	+17.9%	18,905	1.25%
2015-16	259	+8.5%	21,187	1.22%
2016-17	352	+35.9%	23,114	1.52%
2017-18	424	+20.7%	23,792	1.78%
2018-19	437	+3.1%	25,925	1.69%
2019-20	219	-49.9%	27,120	0.81%

1.6 Non-academic appeals address non-academic decisions, for example deregistration for non-engagement or non-payment of fees, decisions relating to residences and accommodation, and financial issues such as designation of fee status or the award of bursaries. There are no new trends. Non-academic appeals have actually increased in 2019-20, which is further evidence that the overall decrease is a result of the progression-award contingency measures put in place in 2020. The significant drop in in 2017-18 was largely a result of changes to the policy on module deregistration that year.

Non-academic appeals

Year	Appeals	Change	Student body	As % of student body
2014-15	72	-1.3%	18,905	0.38%
2015-16	59	-18.0%	21,187	0.28%
2016-17	108	+83.0%	23,114	0.47%
2017-18	59	-45.3%	23,792	0.25%
2018-19	55	-6.8%	25,925	0.21%
2019-20	64	+16.4%	27,120	0.24%

Breakdown by level and year of study

1.7 Breaking down appeal numbers by level of study gives the figures below (2018-19 figures in brackets). These are in line with expectations and correspond in large part with student numbers and the structure of the programmes and the number of decision points that may be appealed. The percentages demonstrate that there was actually very little change in terms of this particular metric. As in past years, there are only a small number of postgraduate research cases, but those tend to be among the most complex to resolve.

Level of study	Appeals received	As a % of all appeals
Undergraduate and foundation	186 (312)	65.7% (63.4%)
Postgraduate taught	94 (172)	33.2 % (35.0%)
Postgraduate research	3 (8)	1.1% (1.6%)
Total	283 (492)	

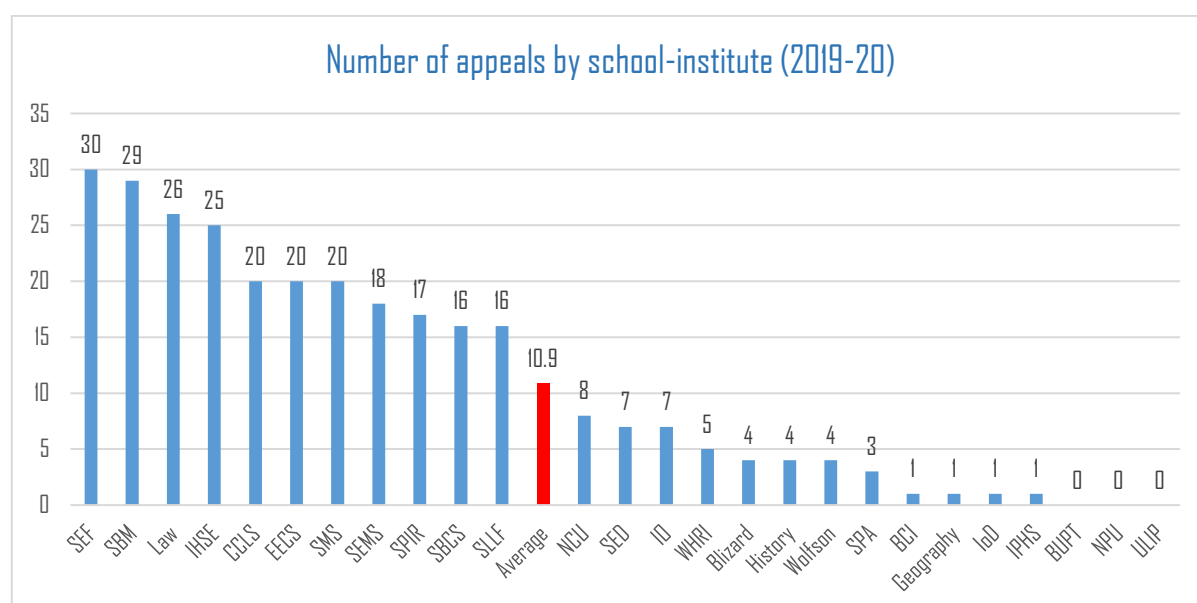
1.8 The next table breaks down appeals by year of study (2018-19 figures in brackets). There has been some movement between categories since last year, but this can largely be attributed to natural variation. Whereas last year saw more appeals from second-year UGs than finalists, this year that metric has reverted to a more expected relationship, that is, with more appeals having been received from finalists. There was also a significant drop in the third to fifth-year UG category. It is again difficult to look past the Covid-19 provisions as an explanation for this.

Year of study	Appeals received	As a % of all appeals
Foundation (Year 0)	1 (2)	0.4% (0.4%)
UG year 1	31 (62)	11.0% (12.6%)
UG year 2	41 (101)	14.5% (20.5%)
UG final year	97 (81)	34.3% (16.5%)
UG year 3 -5	15 (66)	5.3% (13.4%)
Postgraduate taught	95 (172)	33.6% (35.0%)
Postgraduate research	3 (8)	1.1% (1.6%)
Total	283 (492)	

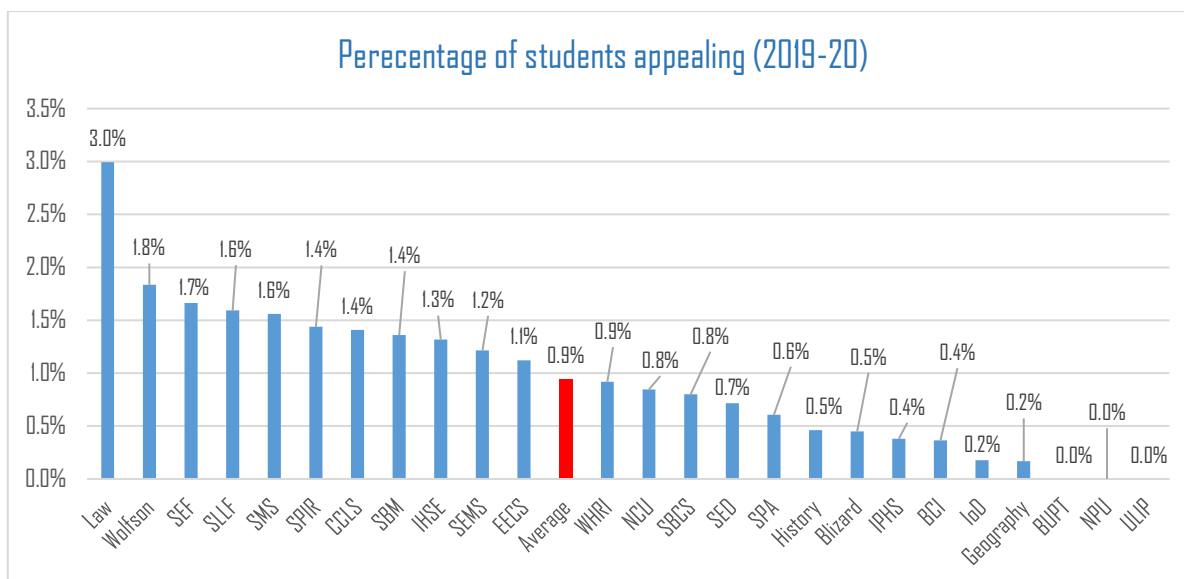
Breakdown by school/institute

1.9 This section of the report looks at the breakdown of cases between schools and institutes.

1.10 In raw numbers, Economics & Finance (10.6% of all appeals), Business & Management (10.2%), Law (9.2%), and Health Sciences Education (8.8%) saw the most appeals. The CCLS, Electronic Engineering & Computer Science, and Mathematical Sciences were next, each seeing 7.1% of all appeals submitted.



1.11 While these percentages have implications in terms of caseload, it is more important to consider the percentage of students in each school making an appeal. Overall, 1% of Queen Mary students submitted an appeal; the average percentage within schools/institutes was 0.9%. The following are substantially above that baseline: Law (3.0%), Wolfson (1.8%), Economics & Finance (1.7%), Languages, Linguistics & Film and Mathematical Sciences (1.6%). Politics & International Relations, CCLS, and Business & Management (1.5%) are also half a percent above the average. It is notable that the NCU figure is the result of a single group appeal, related to condonement regulations that have since been changed. Figures for the large TNE programmes in China have been disaggregated so as not to distort figures for the home schools.



Grounds for appeal and appeal outcomes

1.12 There are two grounds for appeal: procedural error, and exceptional circumstances that – for good reason – could not have been made known at the appropriate time. A student may appeal on either or both grounds. In 2019-20, ninety-three appeals were based on alleged procedural error, 131 on alleged exceptional circumstances, and fifty-six on both grounds. The remaining two failed to specify any grounds for appeal.

1.13 Many 2019-20 appeals remain unresolved at the time of writing this report. However, the general content of those that have been considered remains unchanged from previous years. Common issues raised (with or without merit) included:

- an assessment mark was incorrect, because it did not accord with the student’s idea of their own performance.
- a mark was incorrect because it was out of line with the student’s other results.
- marking was not conducted in line with the published procedures.
- poor feedback or supervision led to a lower mark than the student felt they should have achieved.
- administrative errors in the calculation or recording of marks.
- assessment or award outcomes had been impaired by extenuating circumstances or other exceptional circumstances that, for alleged good reason, were either not made known at the proper time or were not properly considered (typically relating to mental health and alleged impaired judgement-ability to engage). A reasonable number relate to the fit to sit policy, with students who sat the exam claiming that they were unfit to determine their fitness to sit (often only after publication of the results).
- alleged good reason for the non-payment of fees which had led to deregistration.

1.14 Queen Mary does not have an electronic case management system, and data recording and reporting is a manual process. It is therefore difficult to comment in detail on trends within schools (eg, whether there was a high incidence of appeals concerning dissertation supervision in one school). Work is underway to implement such a system, and Queen Mary is asked to endorse the view that this should be viewed an institutional priority.

1.15 The table below details the outcomes of 2019-20 appeals, side-by-side with the 2018-19 figures. This table includes appeals not yet concluded.

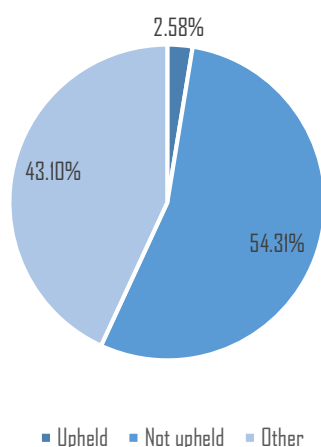
Outcome	Cases (% of cases) 19-20	Cases (% of cases) 18-19
Ongoing at time of report	167 (59.0%)	295 (60.0%)
Upheld	3 (1.1%)	8 (1.6%)
Not upheld	23 (8.1%)	62 (12.6%)
Automatic rejection	21 (7.4%)	17 (3.4%)
Out of time (rejected)	19 (6.7%)	24 (4.9%)
Resolved outside process	30 (10.6%)	73 (14.8%)
Withdrawn by student	20 (7.1%)	13 (2.6%)
Total	283	492

1.16 This table shows the outcomes only for 2019-20 cases that have been resolved.

Outcome	Cases (% of cases) 19-20	Cases (% of cases) 18-19
Upheld	3 (1.1%)	8 (4.1%)
Not upheld: heard and rejected	23 (8.1%)	62 (31.5%)
Not upheld: automatic rejection	21 (7.4%)	17 (8.6%)
Not upheld: out of time	19 (6.7%)	24 (12.2%)
Other: resolved outside process	30 (10.6%)	73 (37.1%)
Other: withdrawn by student	20 (7.1%)	13 (6.6%)
Total	116	197

1.17 The following chart visualises the same data, using only the broader top-level outcomes. 17.7% of cases were resolved without even going through the appeal process. The Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office negotiated alternative informal resolutions in over half of those cases. This is a positive outcome, but the majority of those issues could have been resolved by students and their schools without the submission of a formal appeal.

Appeal outcomes 2019-20 (resolved cases only)



Appeal completion times

1.18 Queen Mary's appeal regulations state that all stages of an appeal (appeal and, where requested, final review) should be completed within three months of the date of receipt. The initial appeal should normally be concluded within two months. Where this is not possible, students are informed of the reason for delay, given (where possible) a revised timeline, and kept informed of progress.

1.19 The following table gives data on the time taken to resolve cases in 2019-20, side-by-side with historical data from 2018-19:

Time taken to resolve cases	2019-20 (%)	2018-19 (%)
Resolved within two months	68 (24.0%)	73 (14.8%)
Resolved in over two months	48 (17.0%)	124 (25.2%)
Unresolved at time of report	167 (59.0%)	295 (60.0%)

1.20 The proportion of cases resolved in longer than two months and the proportion unresolved is very high. There are reasons for this, outlined below, but this provides a poor experience for students and for staff, including staff dealing with the appeals. Queen Mary is asked to give particular consideration to means of addressing this issue.

1.21 ARCS had significant resourcing issues at the start of the 2018-19 year, which also impacted its capacity to process cases in a timely manner in 2019-20. It should be noted that the anomaly of 2019-20, that is, the significant drop in appeals, has presented the student casework team with an opportunity to clear the ongoing backlog, a goal toward which it is making good progress. That said, this opportunity was offset by a significant increase in the number of academic misconduct cases received, which is the subject of the next report.

1.22 ARCS also deals with other categories of casework, including disciplinary cases and complaints. In 2019-20 there were a significant number of unusually complex cases, predominantly cases to do with sexual misconduct and the ongoing pandemic. The increasing complexity of cases is a development that is affecting HEIs generally, and which requires the allocation of a great deal of staff time, to the detriment of other processes.

1.23 As noted in several places, the total number of appeals received in 2019-20 has without doubt been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. It is very likely that Queen Mary will see a significant correction in the summer of 2021. It should be noted that the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office has taken steps to prepare for the expected uptick in appeals. Most significantly, the Office has begun to request from the Registry and the schools/institutes all of the information on deferrals relayed to students during 2020, in order to expedite the investigation of those appeals it is expected will be submitted by those students who were unable to cope with a vastly increased credit load (against the advice of Queen Mary).

1.24 Many appeals are without merit, but still require detailed consideration. Review of the process for automatic dismissal could expedite these cases, with caseworkers rather than the Appeal Chairs taking the decision, for cases purely based on grounds that warrant automatic dismissal under the current policy.

Many other appeals can be resolved informally, by discussion between the student and their school/institute. In many such cases there is no reason for these cases to reach the stage of an appeal – for example, where students feel there has been a procedural error in marking because they have not received or do not understand the feedback, or where there has been an administrative error in the recording of marks. This opportunity for discussion was the intention behind the use of results surgeries, recommended by Senate, with the intention of local resolution wherever possible. The Education Quality and Standards Board (EQSB) has approved the introduction of this stage as a formal step that must be completed before an appeal can progress for consideration at institutional level; however, this formal sign-off will need to be underpinned by the casework management system and so results surgeries currently form the basis of the informal resolution stage, required by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

1.25 From January 2021 the casework team has applied new internal processes in an attempt to keep within our published timelines for the processing of appeals, the aim being to make 2019-20 the final academic year in which appeals are likely to be subject to delays. This approach has at the time of writing been successful, but a full assessment will not be

possible until early-2022. At the same time, these internal processes cannot on their own deliver a permanent solution; this effort must be underpinned by more academic staff/informal resolutions at the school/institute level, noted immediately above.

1.26 The appeals process, together with all student casework processes, is largely manual, involving spreadsheets and emails; the Covid-19 pandemic forced the team to abandon paper files, and this transition has gone very smoothly. An electronic casework management system would allow for online submission, seamless passing of cases between caseworkers and Chairs, allow the team to answer queries from students being supported by another caseworker (in the caseworker's absence), and do away with much of the current labour-intensive recordkeeping. This would expedite the appeals process and reporting processes, both for annual summaries and for the many Freedom of Information requests. It would also improve the granularity of data, eg how many appeals in a given school related to supervision, or to fee status. Early discussions and preparatory work have been underway for some time but have hit delays, particularly in a post-Covid context. A new solution has been identified and could be implemented within six months or so after approval is given; the Board is asked to recognise this as a priority, particularly given Queen Mary's broader shift toward paperless working.

1.27 The current resourcing in the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office is struggling to deal with the volume of cases (of all types) received, and focus may be better directed to reducing the number of appeals. Solutions might include:

- a. a requirement for a more robust 'informal resolution' stage at school/institute prior to submission of any appeal, with a requirement for students to complete this before submitting a formal appeal, as approved by EQSB. As noted at 1.17, a considerable percentage of cases are already resolved informally, but only after going into the appeals system.
- b. assigning direct authority to caseworkers to automatically dismiss cases that – under the [Appeal Policy](#) – are not eligible to be heard.
- c. implementation of the paperless casework management system, to better manage workload and reporting. ARCS has flagged this as a priority with IT Services and has done everything possible to ensure that this is expedited.

1.28 Despite the high number of cases still unresolved, progress has been made in a number of areas this year, particularly following the additional staff resource given to the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office in August 2019. In 2017-18 the annual report noted that a lack of appeal Chairs had led to delays in decision-making. Queen Mary was fortunate to be able to appoint eight additional Deputy Chairs in 2018-19, all of whom are volunteers, which helped considerably in this aspect. Further appointments were made early in the current academic year, again from those who volunteered to assist; the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office would like to thank each person who has stepped forward in the past two years. Further appointments would help even more, and the Office would like to see the involvement of Chairs from those Schools not currently represented. Additionally, the [Appeal Policy](#) was reviewed for the 2019-20 year, making a small number of process adjustments that have aided in the administration of cases. As noted at 1.25, further internal processes have been amended in an attempt to ensure that Queen Mary is not dealing with an appeal backlog from 2020-21 onwards.

[Final Review, and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education](#)

1.29 A student dissatisfied with the outcome of an appeal may submit a request for Final Review if they believe that the appeal procedures were not followed appropriately, and/or the appeal outcome was reasonable in light of the available evidence. Requests are submitted to the Appeals, Complaints and Casework Office, and considered by the nominee of the Principal (currently the acting Academic Registrar).

1.30 There have been twelve requests for final review to date, all of which have been resolved at the time of writing. Ten of those twelve requests were rejected, whilst two were upheld, both of which resulted in students being reinstated to their programmes. This is partial data, however, as many cases remain unresolved. In 2018-19 there were 47 requests for final review (9.6 per cent of the total), of which three were upheld.

1.31 Final review marks the end of Queen Mary's internal appeal procedures. A student still dissatisfied may complain to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). A separate annual report is submitted to the Senate and the Council on OIA cases.

Appendix: Appeal equalities data

1.32 The tables below give breakdowns of cases by the gender, ethnicity, and fee status of the students making the appeals.

Gender	No. appeals	As % of all appeals	
Male	137	48.4%	
Female	146	51.6%	

Ethnicity	No. appeals	As % of all appeals	% within ethnic group*	
			Male	Female
Arab	17	6.0%	64.7% (11)	33.3% (6)
Asian - Bangladeshi	17	6.0%	23.5% (4)	76.5% (13)
Asian - Chinese	35	12.4%	51.4% (18)	48.6% (17)
Asian - Indian	36	12.7%	47.2% (17)	52.8% (19)
Asian - Other	17	6.0%	52.9% (9)	47.1% (8)
Asian - Pakistani	23	8.1%	43.5% (10)	56.5% (13)
Black - African	42	14.8%	52.4% (22)	47.6% (20)
Black - Caribbean	2	0.7%	0.0% (0)	100.0% (2)
Black - Other	2	0.7%	50.0% (1)	50.0% (1)
Gypsy or Traveller	1	0.4%	100.0% (1)	0.0% (0)
I do not know	2	0.7%	50.0% (1)	50.0% (1)
Information refused	5	1.8%	100.0% (5)	0.0% (0)
Not given	6	2.1%	50.0% (3)	50.0% (3)
Other ethnic background	9	3.2%	55.6% (5)	44.4% (4)
Other mixed background	8	2.8%	50.0% (4)	50.0% (4)
White	58	20.5%	41.4% (24)	58.6% (34)
White and Black African	2	0.7%	100.0% (2)	0.0% (0)
White and Black Caribbean	1	0.4%	100.0% (1)	0.0% (0)

(absolute figures are in brackets)

Fee status	No. appeals*	As % of all appeals*
Home-EU	179 (324)	63.3% (65.9%)
Overseas	104 (168)	36.7% (34.1%)

(2018-19 figures in brackets)

Report 2: Academic misconduct

Scope

2.1 This report considers cases considered under the [Academic Misconduct Policy](#). This was the first year that 'assessment offences' were considered as 'academic misconduct', and were governed by a standalone policy, rather than by provisions embedded within the broader Academic Regulations. The [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) introduced some amended penalties, but otherwise presented few significant differences.

2.2 The [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) defined the following as academic misconduct in 2019-20:

- i. breach of any section of the Academic Regulations relating to the conduct of assessment.
- ii. misconduct relating to an invigilated examination or in-class test:
 - a. unauthorised access to an examination paper or venue before an examination.
 - b. forgery of an examination timetable produced by Queen Mary.
 - c. removal of a question paper, answer script, or other examination stationery from an examination venue.
 - d. causing a disturbance during an examination, either physically, verbally, or through an electronic device.
 - e. refusal to cooperate with an invigilator, or to follow an invigilator's instructions.
 - f. possession of unauthorised material while under examination conditions, or leaving unauthorised material in an examination venue (including cloakrooms and toilets).
 - g. access, possession, or use of unauthorised material on a computer, mobile telephone, or other electronic device during an examination.
 - h. communication with another candidate while under examination conditions.
 - i. copying, or attempting to copy, the work of another candidate.
 - j. having writing on the body in an examination venue.
- iii. plagiarism (including self-plagiarism).
- iv. fraudulent reporting of source material.
- v. fraudulent reporting of experimental results, research, or other investigative work.
- vi. collusion in the preparation or production of submitted work, unless such joint or group work is explicitly permitted.
- vii. use, or attempted use, of a ghost-writing service for any part of assessment;
- viii. impersonation of another student in an examination or assessment, or the employment of an impersonator in an examination or assessment.

2.3 Academic misconduct occurring in elements of assessment worth 31 per cent or more of a module mark and all second or subsequent allegations is referred to ARCS. First offences in smaller elements are investigated at school/institute level. This report does not cover school/institute-level academic misconduct, for which complete data is not readily available. ARCS has asked that schools/institutes keep and forward records of these data so that they can be included in the next annual report. It is hoped that the implementation of an electronic casework management process will considerably streamline that process.

Total case numbers

2.4 ARCS investigated 628 distinct allegations of academic misconduct in 2019-20. A handful of students were reported and investigated in relation to more than one allegation.

2.5 The table below shows the increase in allegations of academic misconduct over the past five years. There have been significant increases in four of the past five years. In 2017-18, an

error meant that a significant number of cases that should have come to ARCS had to be investigated at school level. This has distorted the data, and it is likely that the increase in 2017-18 should be significantly higher, and in 2018-19 somewhat lower.

Year	No. alleged offences	Annual change	Student body	As % of student body
2015/16	208	+34%	21,187	1.0%
2016/17	260	+25%	23,114	1.1%
2017/18	277	+7%	23,792	1.2%
2018/19	375	+35%	25,925	1.4%
2019/20	628	+67%	27,120	2.3%

2.6 The number of alleged offences relative to the total student body remains low, but it has continually increased. This may be due in part to improved detection methods, but should be monitored closely, particularly as certain schools have higher incidences than others. There has been an obvious and significant increase in the 2019-20 year.

2.7 In 2019-20, 430 allegations related to UG students and 198 to PGT students. This represents an incidence of 2.2% among UG and 3.3% among PGT students. However, excluding allegations against TNE students and excluding TNE student numbers, the UG incidence rises to 2.6%, bringing it closer to the PG rate.

Breakdown of case numbers

Breakdown by category of alleged offences

2.8 The 628 alleged cases of academic misconduct investigated by ARCS in 2019-20 broke down into the following broad categories:

Allegation	No. cases	of which UG	of which PGT
Plagiarism	398	251	147
Plagiarism – collusion	141	120	21
Exam offence – inc. possession of notes	36	17	19
Exam offence – possession of phone	15	10	5
Exam offence – writing on the body	4	4	0
Exam offence – other	4	4	0
Ghost writing	26	22	4
Fraudulent reporting of source material	1	0	1
Data falsification	1	1	0
Self-plagiarism	2	1	1
Total	628	430	198

2.9 Central investigations of allegations of all kinds have risen across the board, but this is wholly expected given the sharp increase to 628 separate allegations in 2019-20.

Breakdown by developmental year

2.10 The next table provides a breakdown by developmental year. As one might expect, there is a higher incidence of cases in the first years of study as students become familiar with expectations of behaviour and assessment conventions.

Year of study	Plagiarism/ collusion	Exam misconduct	Ghost-writing or other	2019-20 total	% of 2019-20 cases
0 (Foundation)	18	0	0	18	2.9%
1	111	11	0	122	19.4%
2	111	7	19	137	21.8%
3 (if not final year)	23	11	1	35	5.6%
4 (if not final year)	2	3	0	5	0.8%
5 (if not final year)	1	1	0	2	0.3%
Undergrad finalist	106	2	3	111	17.7%
Postgraduate	169	24	5	198	31.5%
Total	541	59	28	628	100%

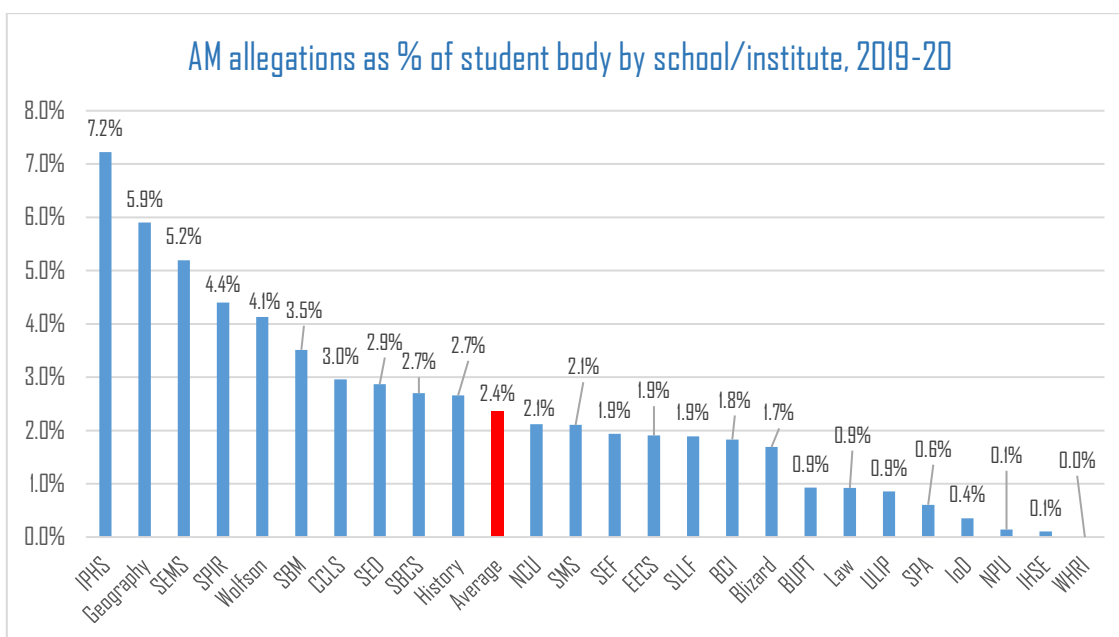
Breakdown by school/institute

2.11 The table provides a breakdown of cases by school/institute and study level.

School/institute	No. cases*	UG	PGT
Engineering & Materials Science (inc. NPU)	78 (12)	63	15
Business and Management	75 (113)	47	28
Biological and Chemical Sciences (inc. Nanchang)	74 (38)	73	1
Elec. Eng. & Com. Science (inc. BUPT)	59 (7)	53	6
Politics and International Relations	52 (33)	31	21
Centre for Commercial Law Studies	42 (19)	0	42
Economics and Finance	35 (23)	11	24
Geography	35 (11)	35	0
English and Drama	28 (13)	27	1
Mathematical Sciences	27 (14)	27	0
History	23 (32)	23	0
Languages, Linguistics and Film	19 (19)	5	14
Population Health Sciences	19 (0)	5	14
International Office	16 (5)	16	0
Blizard Institute	15 (9)	0	15
Wolfson Institute of Preventive Medicine	9 (6)	0	9
Law	8 (0)	8	0
Barts Cancer Institute	5 (3)	0	5
Physics and Astronomy	3 (2)	2	1
Institute of Health Sciences Education	2 (14)	2	0
Dentistry	2 (1)	0	2
University of London Institute in Paris (ULIP)	1 (0)	1	0
UCL Associate	1 (0)	1	0
William Harvey Research Institute	0 (0)	0	0
Total	628	430	198

(2018-19 figures in brackets)

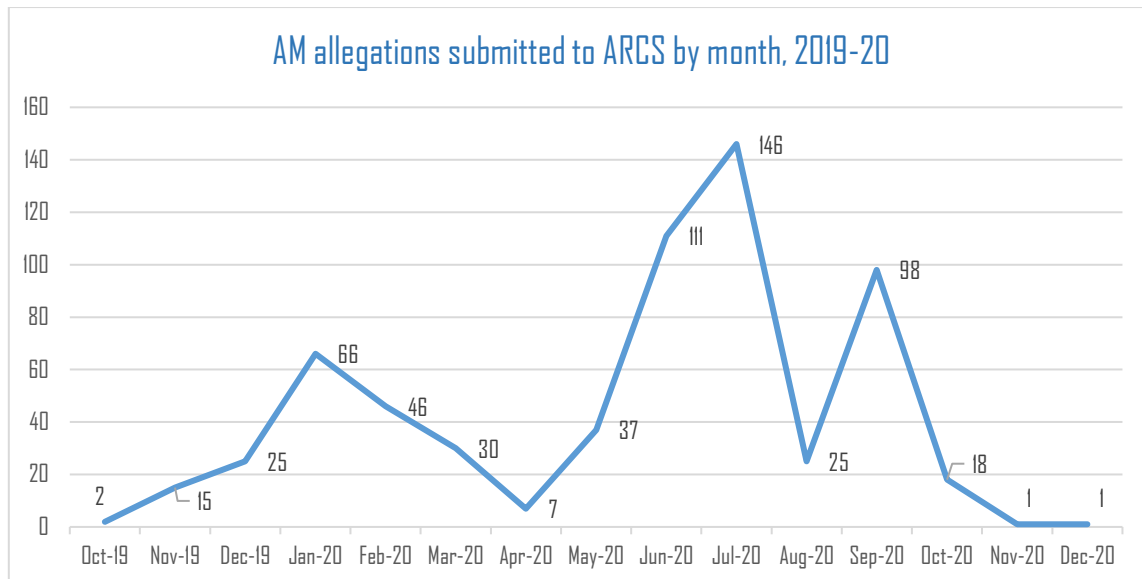
2.12 The following graph takes the same data and displays it as a percentage of the student body, showing the incidence of allegations in each school/institute. The three large transnational education (TNE) programmes have been split out from their home schools so as not to distort data.



- 2.13 Six schools/institutes could be said to have made allegations of academic misconduct at rates notably higher than the institutional average: Population Health Sciences, Geography, Engineering & Materials Science, Politics & International Relations, Wolfson, and Business & Management.
- 2.14 This is the first time Population & Health Sciences has been reported on, and the fact that allegations of academic misconduct are running at three times the institutional average warrants close consideration, as do the results for Geography and Engineering & Materials Science. Business & Management has consistently been towards the top of this particular metric. In the case of the Wolfson, their position is perhaps attributable to the smaller student body – there were nine cases among 218 students. There are no readily apparent reasons for the higher figures, and it is possible that the higher reporting rate is linked to increased vigilance for signs of misconduct rather than a change in student behaviour. All schools and institutes are asked to reflect on these figures.
- 2.15 It has been observed in past years that where schools/institutes include a dedicated induction and introduction to proper referencing techniques and the avoidance of plagiarism, allegations have dropped – sometimes substantially. ARCS can assist with these sessions, and schools/institutes should contact ARCS where this would be helpful. Sessions are best delivered alongside academic staff, to cover subject-specific referencing conventions, etc. This is a priority of the recently appointed Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Manager, so schools/institutes are strongly urged to make contact if they think such sessions would be helpful.

Investigations and turnaround times

- 2.16 All students accused of committing an academic misconduct were given the opportunity to respond to the allegations in writing. Students were provided with evidence relating to the concern at the same time as they were informed of the allegation by ARCS.
- 2.17 Where a student accepts or does not deny an offence (either by statement or by failing to respond) the case is heard by the Chair or Deputy Chair of the Academic Misconduct Panel alone. This also applies where a student denies an allegation but agrees to have it heard by the Chair/Deputy. In other cases, a full Panel is convened.
- 2.18 The [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) does not include specific guidance on turnaround times for cases. The mean average time taken to close a case in 2019-20 was 76 calendar days. This is an increase on previous averages: 2018-19 (63), 2017-18 (54), and 2016-17 (56). This rising figure is wholly expected given the extraordinary year-on-year increase from 2018-19 (67%), as well as the significant increase from the year before (35%).
- 2.19 The time taken to resolve a case is dependent on its complexity (ghost-writing, for example, is time-consuming to evidence), on the response times of students and staff, the availability of the Academic Misconduct Chairs and Panel members, and staff time in the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office.
- 2.20 As noted in the preceding report on appeals, the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office was restructured as 2018-19 became 2019-20. Cover had initially been provided by temporary staff, with two permanent members of staff and one member of staff on a fixed-term contract starting at that point. This created a bottleneck of cases prior to August 2019, resulting in delays at significant points of the year, affecting progression and award. ARCS was for a some of 2019-20 working to time on academic misconduct cases, but the increase in absolute numbers and – particularly – the ongoing appeal backlog, dealt with by the same staff, does make this an area of some concern.



2.21 In the summer of 2020, ARCS began a campaign to recruit new Deputy Chairs. This has proved successful and there are currently nine Deputy Chairs working alongside the Chair. This has been a welcome change, however, the sheer volume of allegations reported in 2019-20 overwhelmed the administrative capacity of the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office, as noted above in 2.18 and 2.20. Queen Mary is asked to consider means of recognising academic staff for these critical and sometimes time-consuming roles; their good citizenship is very welcome and the Office would like to thank them for their contribution.

2.22 At the same time, ARCS began a campaign to appoint a standing pool of Academic Misconduct Panel members. Until 2019-20, panellists had to be members of the Senate; these colleagues often had limited availability, which led to delays in scheduling panels. It is hoped that these additional appointments will resolve this and engage more staff across the institution with the process.

2.23 Cases can be expedited by reporting them to ARCS as soon as possible, and by schools/institutes and students responding quickly to communications from the caseworkers. The graph above shows the peak periods in which cases are received, primarily linked to major assessment points. Faster identification and referral of non-examination cases helps to spread investigations out and expedite cases.

2.24 With the increasing volume of cases, Queen Mary might consider whether the threshold for central investigation should be raised above 30 per cent, perhaps to 40 or to 49 per cent. This matter will be raised with the relevant Assessment and Feedback sub-group. Whilst this shift would of course result in a greater number of allegations being processed by schools/institutes, the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office would welcome the opportunity to work closely with the schools/institutes to ensure their internal processes maximise efficiency whilst adhering to the requirements of the [Academic Misconduct Policy](#).

Case outcomes

2.25 At the time of writing, eighteen of the 628 allegations reported in 2019-20 are outstanding; 610 allegations have been resolved to date. It was found that academic misconduct had occurred in 546 of those 610 cases, which equates to 89.5%. The remaining cases were resolved as follows: fifty-four allegations were dismissed (8.9%); nine allegations were withdrawn by the reporting school/institute (1.5%); and one allegation was returned to be processed by the reporting school/institute as a technical offence.

2.26 Where a student is found guilty of an offence, the Chair/Panel assigns a penalty from a fixed list found in either the [Academic Misconduct Policy](#), or in the Academic Regulations in the case of TNE programmes. The most severe penalties, suspension and expulsion, can only be recommended by a full Panel, and require approval from the Principal. If a student commits multiple offences, a more severe penalty will normally be applied on each occasion.

2.27 The tables below show the detailed outcomes of cases referred to ARCS in 2019-20. Note that the TNE programmes have a different set of penalties, so have been split into a separate table. The penalties for non-TNE programmes were revised for 2019-20, partly to take account of the introduction of semester-based examinations – the old penalty v.) failed students outright in all modules for the year; under the new calendar, this would include modules that the student had not even started, which was deemed unfair.

Penalty/outcome (non-TNE programmes)*	Plagiarism/ collusion	Exam misconduct	Ghost- writing/other
Case dismissed/withdrawn/returned	56	3	3
i.) formal reprimand	28	4	3
ii.) element of assessment capped	72	6	0
iii.) fail element, capped resubmission, same attempt	263	6	13
iv.) module capped	10	0	1
v.) fail module, capped resit, subsequent attempt	64	21	5
vi.) fail module with no right to resit/retake	3	0	0
vii.) all modules in current AY capped	1	0	0
viii.) suspension from Queen Mary	0	0	0
ix.) expulsion from Queen Mary	0	0	0
i.) and ii.) in conjunction	3	0	0
i.) and iii.) in conjunction	2	0	0
i.) and v.) in conjunction	4	0	0
Ongoing	8	0	3
Total	514	40	28

* the phrasing and detail of the penalties has been abbreviated for this report

Penalty/outcome (TNE programmes)*	Plagiarism/ collusion	Exam misconduct	Ghost- writing/other
Case dismissed/withdrawn/returned	2	0	0
i.) formal warning	1	3	0
ii.) failure in element, uncapped resubmission	1	1	0
iii.) failure in element, capped resubmission	15	2	0
iv.) failure in element, resit available if module failed	4	5	0
v.) failure in module, capped resit	2	3	0
vi.) reduction of classification by one level	0	0	0
vii.) Expulsion	0	0	0
Penalties v. and vi. in conjunction	0	0	0
Ongoing	2	5	0
Total	27	19	0

* the phrasing and detail of the penalties has been abbreviated for this report

2.28 For the non-TNE programmes, penalty iii.) was by far the most frequently used in 2019-20, with 282 applications. Penalty iii.) is generally used for first offences of relatively minor plagiarism or related offences; it is the lowest penalty available when the work cannot stand. Penalty v.) was the next most used, with 90 applications. For the TNE programmes, penalty iii.) was also the most frequently used, however, that iteration of the penalty allows for an uncapped resubmission.

2.29 Students found to have committed a plagiarism offence are advised to seek advice from their school/institute on avoiding plagiarism in future, and are advised of support on academic practice offered by Student and Academic Services.

Equalities data

2.30 The tables below break down the 2019-20 cases set by ethnicity, fee status, and gender.

Ethnicity	No. cases	% of cases	% of whom UG	% of whom PGT
Arab	29	4.6%	79.3%	20.7%
Asian - Bangladeshi	85	13.5%	88.2%	11.8%
Asian - Chinese	111	17.7%	61.3%	38.7%
Asian - Indian	81	12.9%	45.7%	54.3%
Asian - Other	44	7.0%	72.7%	27.3%
Asian - Pakistani	56	8.9%	82.1%	17.9%
Black - African	86	13.7%	64.0%	36.0%
Black - Caribbean	2	0.3%	50.0%	50.0%
Black - other	5	0.8%	60.0%	40.0%
Not given	14	2.2%	78.6%	21.4%
Other background	10	1.6%	80.0%	20.0%
Other mixed background	10	1.6%	60.0%	40.0%
Unknown background	7	1.1%	100.0%	0.0%
White	81	12.9%	64.2%	35.8%
White and Asian	5	0.8%	80.0%	20.0%
White and Black African	1	0.2%	100.0%	0.0%
White and Black Caribbean	1	0.2%	100.0%	0.0%
Total	628			

Fee status	As % of all cases	As % of UG cases	As % of PGT cases
Home/EU	55.7%	67.9%	29.3%
Overseas	44.3%	32.1%	70.7%

Gender	As % of all cases	As % of UG cases	As % of PGT cases
Male	45.2%	43.0%	50.0%
Female	54.8%	57.0%	50.0%

Report 3: Complaints, Discipline, and Fitness to Practise

Scope

3.1 This third report concerns the smaller categories of student casework: complaints, discipline, and fitness to practise. Numbers are far lower than for appeals or academic misconduct, so it can be harder to draw out patterns of behaviour. Although fewer in number, these cases are often complex in nature and usually take more time to resolve.

Complaints

3.2 The Queen Mary [Student Complaints Policy](#) has three formal stages (plus an informal resolution stage). Stage 1 is handled at school/institute or service level. Stages 2 and 3 are coordinated by the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office in ARCS. Decisions at Stage 2 are taken by one of two Complaints Assessors, appointed from among the academic staff. Decisions at Stage 3 are taken by a Principal's nominee, and are currently undertaken by one of the Academic Registrars. If a student remains unsatisfied after Stage 3, they have recourse to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

3.3 This report covers complaints made at institutional level, Stages 2 and 3. Schools and institutes handle cases at Stage 1. As discussed in the other casework reports, a casework management system would also be of benefit for student complaints as it would allow cases to be tracked easily at each stage, and would provide for fuller, better, and more

useful reporting data; there is an increasing requirement for external reporting on complaints and it is important for us to have systems that efficiently allow the gathering of data from across the institution.

- 3.4 ARCS will present amendments to the [Student Complaints Policy](#) to the May 2021 meeting of the Education Quality and Standards Board, following a review of current practice at Queen Mary and in the sector and of relevant good practice guides. The review will examine the number of formal stages in the process and seek to include a greater number of colleagues who can review cases, following a successful recruitment campaign among senior Professional Services staff.

Complaints: numbers and nature

- 3.5 In 2019-20, the ARCS received twenty-one Stage 2 complaints, which is similar to the number received in 2018-19 (23), and fewer than the number received in 2017-18 (33). Two points must be noted: one student has submitted six formal complaints as part of a related set of alleged issues, however, for the purposes of this report those six complaints have been counted as one; numbers for this type of casework tend to fluctuate (there were only seventeen complaints in 2016-17, and just ten in 2015-16).
- 3.6 The complaints considered in 2019-20 are notable for their tendency to raise both academic and non-academic concerns in the same complaint. The complexity of this type of case is the primary cause of the difficulty in identifying and describing broad trends within this particular type of casework.
- 3.7 Those complaints that were solely non-academic in nature concerned:
- alleged misleading information at the point of admission (1)
 - alleged fee status/visa issues (2)
 - alleged poor on-campus security provision and facilities (1)
 - allegations relating to service at the Queen Mary Legal Advice Centre (1)
 - alleged residential issues (2)
 - complaints against members of staff (2)
- 3.8 Those complaints that were solely academic in nature concerned:
- dissatisfaction with the academic judgement of Queen Mary staff (1)
 - dissatisfaction with the academic nature of a programme (1).
- 3.9 The remaining complaints blended various academic and non-academic issues. As a broad overview, ARCS received nine complaints that contained a long list of smaller issues through which students expressed dissatisfaction with a number of issues related to their experience. These cases included reference to one or more of the following:
- the academic judgement of Queen Mary staff;
 - issues with individual programmes of study;
 - the provision of research supervision;
 - support frameworks, including disability support;
 - the representation of programmes at the admissions stage;
 - measures put in place in response to industrial action;
 - the scope and execution of Stage 1 complaint investigations and outcomes;
 - the behaviour of Queen Mary staff.

It should be noted that only one complaint in 2019-20 referred to the provisions put in place by Queen Mary in response to the Covid-19 pandemic; four complaints referred to the industrial action that took place 2019-20. It is possible that a greater number of complaints in relation to Queen Mary's response to the Covid-19 pandemic may be received by the conclusion of the 2020-21 academic year. The advice with regard to complaints of this nature is aligned with the advice in relation to complaints about

industrial action: students have been advised to contact their school or institute in the first instance. This approach enables the school or institute to assess complaints in relation to teaching and learning, to check what has been delivered, and to ascertain whether students have missed any learning opportunities or may have been disadvantaged in a different way. It is noted that this approach should be framed by recent QAA guidance, *Talking about Quality - Supporting Student Discussions on Quality, Standards and Value for Money*.

Complaints: outcomes and timescales

3.10 At the time of writing, one Stage 2 complaint remains under investigation. Of the completed Stage 2 complaints, two complaints were upheld, eleven were not upheld, two were partially upheld, and two were rejected (both for being out of time). Two complaints were transferred to Human Resources as they related to complaints about staff conduct. It should be noted that one complaint went straight to Stage 3 since Stages 1 and 2 were undertaken by the Queen Mary Legal Advice Centre. Queen Mary aims to resolve Stage 2 complaints within one month. Where this is not possible, the complainant is informed and provided with the reason for the delay.

3.11 The average time taken to resolve a complaint at Stage 2 in 2019-20 was 98 calendar days. This is down from 2018-19 (127) and 2017-18 (122), but up from 2016-17 (72). It is notable that three of these figures fall outside a timeline the OIA would normally deem acceptable, which is 90 calendar days.

3.12 The timeframe for resolution of Stage 2 complaints is tight as it includes seven days for the student to submit any additional evidence, and a further seven days for the student to comment on a case summary before a decision is made. Complaints are more often than not complex and nuanced, requiring extended back and forth correspondence between the various parties. Staff in the casework team are dealing with a high volume of other casework at the same time as complaints, and these competing demands can impact on turnaround times. The casework team undertakes a triage process for new cases and will always seek to find a quick solution for a complaint case where this is available.

3.13 The table below details the length of time taken to resolve Stage 2 complaints in 2019-20.

Time taken to resolve complaint	Number of complaints 2019-20*
Within 30 days	2 (2)
Between 30 and 90 days	4 (5)
More than 90 days	14 (16)
Ongoing	2 (n/a)
(2018-19 figures in brackets)	

3.14 Twelve complaints went to Stage 3 in 2019-20, a sharp increase from 2018-19 when only four were escalated. Of the ten Stage 3 complaints considered in 2019-20, two were upheld, one was partially upheld, seven were not upheld, and two are ongoing at the time of writing.

Complaints: equalities data and breakdowns

3.15 Full equalities data has not been included as numbers are small and could allow identification of individual cases. However, there is an almost equal split between male and female students, whilst almost half of the complaints were white, with the other half split between seven other ethnic groups. Just four of the twenty-one complainants were classified as overseas students. There were no schools/institutes with disproportionately high case numbers: the William Harvey and English & Drama both had three complaints, Business & Management, Dentistry, Electronic Engineering & Computer Science, Population Health Sciences, Health Sciences Education, Mathematical Sciences, and ULIP each had two complaints.

Disciplinary misconduct

3.16 The Queen Mary [Code of Student Discipline](#) deals with issues of student behaviour. It includes procedures for investigation at school/institute/department level, and at the institutional level. ARCS holds only institutional level data, and it is hoped that an electronic casework system will allow for better reporting. Institutional level cases are normally investigated by the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office. The Academic Registrar and a Vice-Principal then determine whether to proceed with the case, and if this occurs, a dedicated Student Disciplinary Committee hears the case and may determine outcomes specified by the Code. A student may appeal the outcome in the usual way and go to the OIA if they remain unsatisfied with the procedure.

3.17 Nine allegations of disciplinary misconduct were received by ARCS in 2019-20, a significant drop from the twenty-four allegations received in 2018-19. This is a return to the raw numbers seen in 2017-18 (11) and 2016-17 (10).

3.18 Although the case numbers did drop significantly, disciplinary cases require a great deal of time and resource to investigate, and generally require prioritisation – this is often to the detriment of the resolution of other case types, notably appeals and academic misconduct. It is worth noting that, like complaints, this type of casework does also fluctuate; thirteen cases have already been received in 2020-21, so it is likely the numbers will spike again by the time the next report is due.

3.19 The nine allegations received in 2019-20 featured the following behaviour:

- knife crime (2)
- sexual misconduct (3)
- inappropriate student behaviour (1)
- research misconduct (1)
- online racial and homophobic abuse (2)
- bullying and harassment (1)

3.20 Of the nine referrals, it was agreed that no further action would be taken under the Code in two cases. Six students were found to have committed disciplinary misconduct to some degree at a Student Disciplinary Committee hearing. One case is ongoing.

3.21 Where cases were proven at Panel, penalties awarded included formal and final warnings, requirements for students to make apologies, requirements for students to undertake specific training, restrictions of activity, and suspension.

3.22 In 2019-20, ARCS investigated another knife-related incident (involving two students), following multiple knife-related incidents in 2018-19, and has received increased requests for guidance from schools/institutes in dealing with violent and disruptive behaviour. ARCS is committed to working closely with schools/institutes since the lower level process can tackle negative behaviour quickly, which is in the interests of all concerned. For particularly serious cases, however, ARCS leads the process under the central provisions.

3.23 For cases involving allegations of sexual misconduct, Queen Mary has started to use a specialist external investigator to better support all parties, and to try to conclude investigations as quickly as possible. The casework team works together with QMSU and Student and Academic Services through the Dignity at Work and Study Group to improve our approach to handling cases of this nature, and will review the Code of Student Discipline for 2021-22 to address some emerging issues. The review will also take into account the statement from the Office for Students with regard to expectations to [prevent and address harassment and sexual misconduct](#). Queen Mary is also in the process of organising training for Panel Chairs with a specialist provider. The introduction of [Report + Support](#) has also proved helpful in ensuring students are properly informed of options,

sources of support, and possible outcomes. R+S is now the preferred method of receiving allegations of disciplinary misconduct, however, ARCS will investigate irrespective of how a matter is raised. Finally, 'conduct alerts', to be issued by schools/institutes, have been introduced to deal with low-level misconduct that would be better dealt with outside a formal disciplinary process.

Discipline: equalities data and breakdown

3.24 Equalities data and other breakdowns of the data have not been included for student discipline cases as the numbers are small and this would potentially allow for identification of individual students.

Fitness to practise

3.25 Fitness to Practise cases relate only to qualifying medical and dental programmes, and specifically to whether a student's behaviour calls into question whether they would be a fit and proper practitioner. Cases are investigated under the [Fitness to Practise and Professional Capability Regulations](#). The Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office in ARCS administers the Fitness to Practise hearing, but investigations are led by the specialist Chair of the Fitness to Practise and Professional Capability Committee, or their appointed nominee. If a case proceeds to a Fitness to Practise Committee, the Committee includes relevant professionals external to Queen Mary.

3.26 Queen Mary heard only one fitness to practise case in 2019-20. The case was proven and certain conditions were placed on the student in order to enable them to continue on the programme, but further details and equalities data cannot be included here without risking the identification of the student involved. In 2018-19 there was one case, in 2017-18 there were two.