



Senate

Paper title	Student Casework Reports 2020-21
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. Academic misconduct 2. Appeals 3. Complaints, disciplinary misconduct, and fitness to practise <p>ARCS report 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 available upon request.</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 alleged to have committed academic misconduct again rose sharply, from 2.3% to 3.9%, a 77% year-on-year increase following a 67% year-on-year increase the year before. 2. The number of appeals received in 2020-21 returned to expected levels, that is, between 400-500 appeals each academic year; 431 appeals were received in 2020-21. 3. The number of Stage 2 complaints received in 2020-21 was 29, up from 21 in 2019-20. This is a normal number of Stage 2 complaints, which tends to settle between 20 and 30 each academic year. 4. Disciplinary misconduct cases have risen in 2020-21 after a fall in 2019-20. Their complexity has remained the same, including several allegations involving sexual misconduct, for which Queen Mary has retained the services of an independent investigator to investigate sexual misconduct cases. It is noted that an increasing number of allegations involving inappropriate use of social media have been reported. 5. Only two fitness to practise hearings took place in 2020-21. 6. An electronic casework management system should be ready within the coming months and should certainly be in place for the 2022-23 academic year. 7. Minor changes to the appeals and academic misconduct policies and limited but significant changes to the complaints and discipline policies were approved in 2021. This has had a positive impact and as Queen Mary moves further beyond the

	impacts of Covid-19, further positive affects should become apparent.
Questions to consider	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Senate is asked to consider and comment on the report. 2. Should any and all measures required to address academic misconduct, and academic integrity more generally, be considered an institutional priority? 3. Under the current Academic Misconduct Policy, 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 to be conducted at school/institute level, including a greater range of penalties available at that level, and further comment within the context of this report is invited. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. At EQSB it was noted that linking assessment value to the credit value of the relevant module could be a way forward in terms of determining if an instance of misconduct is considered at school/institute level or by the ACCO; further comment on this concept is invited. 4. How can the appeal process be improved from the student perspective? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. More focus on an informal stage as a step to unlocking the formal process would be welcome, but in the meantime the ACCO would encourage schools and institutes to continue to think about how an informal stage works best for them, in the form of results surgeries or otherwise, as students are often seeking feedback on their performance and the appeals process is not able to do this, which often leads to frustration.
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	Aligns with the Queen Mary Strategy 2030 Excellence in Education Excellence in Student Engagement Excellence in Student Employability Excellence in Learning Environment
Reporting/ consideration route for the paper	Senate and EQSB to consider. An abridged version of this report will be considered by Senior Executive Team and the Council.
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Student Casework Reports 2020-21

Report 1: Academic misconduct

Scope

1.1 This report covers cases of academic misconduct considered under the [Academic Misconduct Policy](#). This was the second year that academic misconduct was covered by a standalone policy, after removing it from the yearly Academic Regulations. This has been a positive change.

1.2 The [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) defined the following as academic misconduct in 2020-21:

- 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.

Academic misconduct occurring in any elements of assessment worth 31 per cent or more of a module mark, and all second or subsequent allegations, are referred to ARCS, specifically the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office (ACCO) for investigation. 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. It is hoped that the imminent implementation of an online academic misconduct workflow – situated in MySIS and modelled on the extenuating circumstances workflow – will considerably streamline that process.

Total case numbers

1.3 The ACCO investigated 1,112 distinct allegations of academic misconduct in 2020-21. A small number of students were reported and investigated in relation to more than one allegation;

there were also a handful of students who were investigated on multiple occasions for the same module.

1.4 The table below shows the increase in allegations of academic misconduct over the past seven years. There have been significant increases in five of the past six years. In 2017-18 there was an issue with the reporting of cases from one school, and a significant number of cases that should have come to the ACCO 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
2014-15	155	(-7%)	18,905	0.8%
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%
2020-21	1,112	+77%	28, 715	3.9%

1.5 The number of alleged offences relative to the total student body remains low (but significant), however, this is the seventh consecutive year this figure has increased. Following a significant increase in the 2019-20 academic year, the most recent jump warrants serious attention by every relevant stakeholder across the University.

1.6 In 2020-21, the ACCO received 797 allegations related to UG students and 315 to PGT students. This represents an incidence of 3.8% among UG students (up from 2.2% in 2019-20) and 5.5% among PGT students (up from 3.3% in 2019-20).

Breakdown of case numbers

Breakdown by category of alleged offences

1.7 The 1,112 allegations of academic misconduct processed by the ACCO in 2020-21 can be broken down into the following categories:

Allegation	No. cases	of which UG	of which PGT
Plagiarism	597	404	193
Collusion	303	217	86
Exam offence – unauthorised material	15	15	0
Exam offence – phone/electronic device	5	5	0
Exam offence – writing on the body	4	4	0
Exam offence – other	9	9	0
Ghost writing	79	74	5
Fraudulent reporting of source material	2	1	1
Self-plagiarism	8	3	5
Multiple offences	90	65	25
Total	1,112	797	315

1.8 Central investigations of allegations of all kinds have increased across the board, but this is wholly expected given the unprecedented increase seen in the 2020-21 academic year.

Breakdown by developmental year

1.9 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 the

expectations of academic practice in the UK. It is worth noting that there is strong anecdotal evidence that a significant number of students from outside the UK struggle initially with understanding what is expected of them. Any future discussions on the best way to tackle academic misconduct should address this point.

Year of study	Plagiarism or collusion	Examination offence	Ghost-writing or other	2020-21 total	% of 2020-21 cases
0 (Foundation)	9	0	7	16	1.44%
1	215	15	53	283	25.45%
2	193	7	60	260	23.38%
3 (if not final year)	19	5	1	25	2.25%
4 (if not final year)	1	5	0	6	0.54%
5 (if not final year)	0	1	0	1	0.09%
Undergraduate finalist	184	0	22	206	18.53%
Taught postgraduate	279	0	36	315	28.33%
Total	900	33	179	1112	100%

Breakdown by school/institute

1.10 The table provides a breakdown of cases in 2020-21 by school/institute and study level. It also includes the percentage increase/decrease from the 2019-20 academic year.

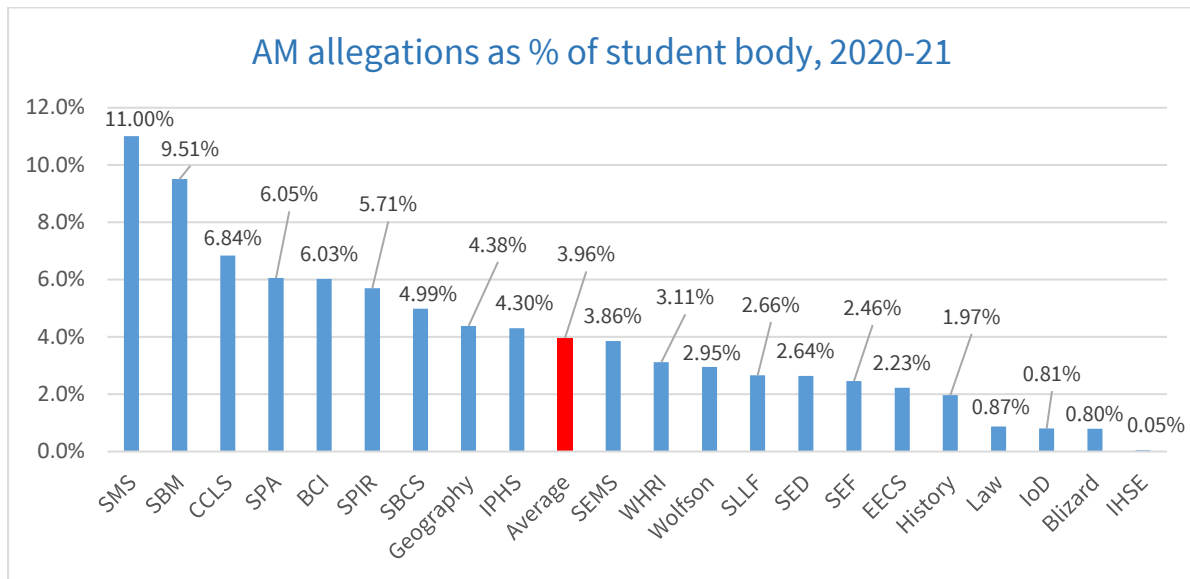
School/institute	2020-21 cases (2019-20)	% change from 2019-20	UG cases	PGT cases
Business and Management	226 (75)	201%	153	73
Mathematical Sciences	148 (27)	448%	120	28
Biological and Chemical Sciences (inc. Nanchang)	127 (74)	72%	120	7
Elec. Eng. & Com. Science (inc. BUPT)	109 (59)	85%	68	41
Engineering & Materials Science (inc. NPU)	99 (78)	27%	90	9
Politics and International Relations	76 (52)	46%	59	17
Centre for Commercial Law Studies	59 (42)	40%	0	59
Physics and Astronomy	50 (3)	1567%	47	3
Economics and Finance	40 (35)	14%	35	5
Languages, Linguistics and Film	27 (19)	42%	23	4
Geography	26 (35)	-26%	20	6
English and Drama	25 (28)	-11%	24	1
William Harvey Research Institute	19 (0)	n/a	0	19
History	18 (23)	-22%	18	0
Barts Cancer Institute	17 (5)	240%	0	17
Institute of Population Health Sciences	16 (19)	-16%	3	13
Law	10 (8)	25%	10	0
Blizard Institute	7 (15)	-53%	1	6
Wolfson Institute of Preventive Medicine	7 (9)	-22%	0	7
Institute of Dentistry	5 (2)	150%	5	0
Institute of Health Sciences Education	1 (2)	-50%	1	0
Total	1,112		797	315

In some cases, the increase in the number of cases is significant:

- The School of Physics and Astronomy saw an increase of 1567%
- The School of Mathematical Sciences saw an increase of 448%
- The School of Business and Management saw an increase of 201%
- The School of Electronic Engineering and Computer Science (incl. BUPT) saw an increase of 85%
- The School of Biological and Chemical Sciences (incl. Nanchang) saw an increase of 72%

It must be noted that the newly created School of Physical and Chemical Sciences would see another significant increase in 2021-22 as it absorbs modules taught by the Department of Chemistry (approximately 50 cases) without intervention by the School and/or University. Consequently, the newly created School of Biological and Behavioural Sciences should see a decrease in the number of centrally reported cases in 2021-22.

1.11 This graph takes the same data and displays it as a percentage of the student body, showing the incidence of allegations in each school/institute. Given the low rate of reported TNE academic misconduct, this data has been included below.



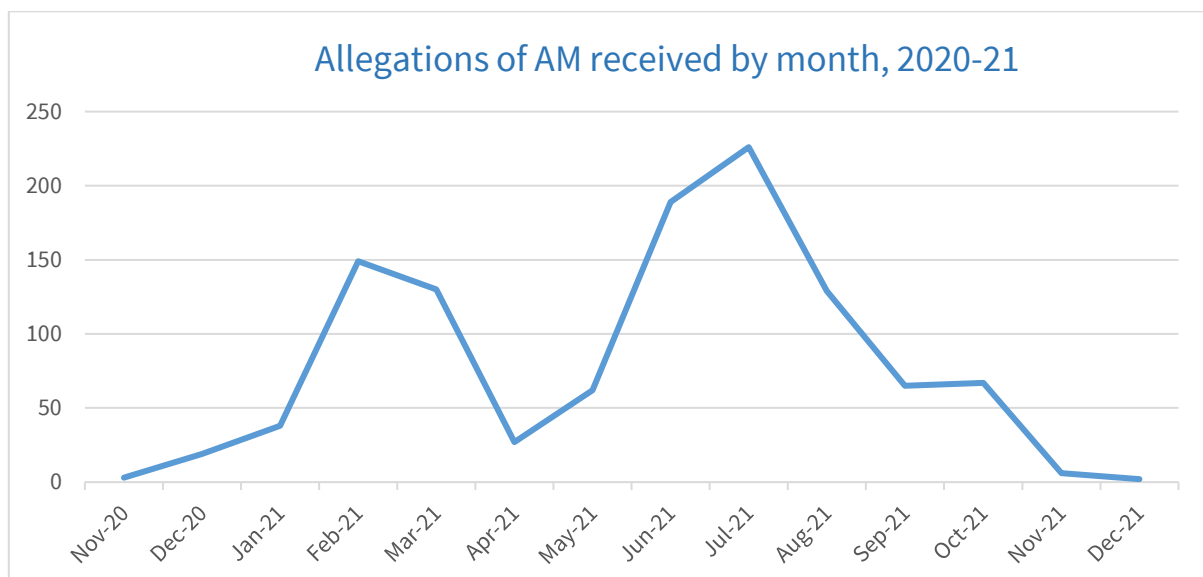
1.12 Six schools/institutes could be said to have made allegations of academic misconduct at rates notably higher than the institutional average: Mathematical Sciences, Business and Management, the Centre for Commercial Law Studies, Physics and Astronomy, the Barts Cancer Institute, and Politics and International Relations.

1.13 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. The ACCO can assist with these sessions, and schools/institutes should contact the ACCO 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 Head of the ACCO, so schools/institutes are strongly urged to make contact if they think such sessions would be helpful.

1.14 The Queen Mary Academy, with input from various stakeholders including the ACCO, is currently developing an online academic integrity module. It is envisaged that this will be a University wide module in the first instance, addressing general principles of academic integrity. Content specific to the local needs of specific schools is being discussed as part of the current development, however, this is still at an early stage. It is hoped that the module will be in place in the first semester of the 2022-23 academic year.

Investigations and turnaround times

- 1.15 All students accused of committing academic misconduct were given an 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 the ACCO.
- 1.16 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 or a Deputy. In other cases, a full Panel is convened.
- 1.17 The [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) does not include specific guidance on turnaround times for cases. For the resolved cases only, the mean average time taken to close a case in 2020-21 was 102 calendar days. This is a significant increase on the last academic year, and continues the trend of rising average completion times: 2019-20 (76), 2018-19 (63), 2017-18 (54), and 2016-17 (56). This rising figure is wholly expected given the last three year-on-year increases have been 35%, 67%, and 77%, respectively.
- 1.18 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 Chair/Deputy Chairs and Panel members, as well as staff availability within the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office.
- 1.19 Academic misconduct overwhelmed the ACCO in 2020-21; for the significant parts of the academic year, the ACCO was forced to devote its time to academic misconduct exclusively, to the significant detriment of other student casework processes. The repercussions of this will be felt until at least mid-2022. It must be noted that the ACCO has in the past six months been bolstered by the addition of two temporary members of staff, seconded from other areas of the University. In addition to this, further temporary resource will be in place from Feb-July 2022, and a request for additional resource is under review.



- 1.20 Since the summer of 2020, the ACCO has been recruiting as many Deputy Chairs as possible. This has continued in recent months with great success; there are currently twenty-seven Deputy Chairs working alongside the Chair. This has been a welcome change, however, the sheer volume of allegations reported in 2019-20 and 2020-21 has overwhelmed the

administrative capacity of the ACCO, as noted above. 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.

- 1.21 Cases can be expedited by reporting them to the ACCO 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, however, given the volume of cases we have seen and can expect in the future, urgent attention is required in order to formulate University-wide and multi-faceted approaches.
- 1.22 Based on the previous two years, it is predicted that the ACCO will receive between 1,200 and 1,300 allegations of academic misconduct in 2021-22. Previous conversations about increasing the reporting threshold should be revisited; the ACCO is very strongly committed to working with all schools and institutes to improve the current situation, and all necessary support will be provided. It is unlikely, however, that this single step will be enough. Discussions need to be had across Queen Mary about academic misconduct, and it is clear that only a multi-faceted approach will have any serious impact on the numbers.
- 1.23 The ACCO has communicated with the schools on several occasions regarding academic misconduct during 2020-21. The ACCO welcomes the engagement of colleagues and committees in recognising and beginning to address the issue. This must continue, with a particular focus on the design of robust assessments, the education of students, and the recognition of academic staff supporting the process. It is critical that every possible effort is made to prevent the prediction noted above at paragraph 2.22 from being realised.

Case outcomes

- 1.24 At the time of writing, 132 of the 1,112 allegations reported to the ACCO in 2020-21 are outstanding; 980 allegations have been resolved to date. It was found that academic misconduct had occurred in 869 of those 980 cases, which equates to 88.7%. The remaining cases were resolved as follows: 88 allegations were dismissed (8.9%); 2 allegations were withdrawn by the reporting school/institute; 12 allegations were returned to be processed by the reporting school/institute as a technical offence; and 3 allegations were against students who subsequently withdrew from Queen Mary.
- 1.25 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 the Nanchang and BUPT programmes. The most severe penalties, suspension and expulsion, can only be recommended by a full Panel, and require approval from the President and Principal. If a student commits multiple offences, a more severe penalty will normally be applied on each occasion.
- 1.26 The tables below show the detailed outcomes of cases referred to the ACCO in 2020-21. Note that the TNE programmes have a different set of penalties, so have been split into a separate table. This is the second year that the penalties listed below have been in place.

Outcome (non-TNE programmes) – The phrasing of the penalties has been abbreviated for this report	Plagiarism or collusion	Exam misconduct	All other misconduct
Case dismissed/withdrawn/returned	87	0	14
i.) formal reprimand	21	0	2
ii.) element of assessment capped	57	0	1
iii.) fail element, capped resubmission, same attempt	536	1	58
iv.) module capped	2	0	3
v.) fail module, capped resit, subsequent attempt	97	0	18
vi.) fail module with no right to resit/retake	3	0	20
vii.) all modules in current AY capped	0	0	0
viii.) suspension from Queen Mary	0	0	0
ix.) expulsion from Queen Mary	0	0	0
i.) and ii.) in conjunction	2	0	0
i.) and iii.) in conjunction	3	0	0
i.) and v.) in conjunction	1	0	0
i.) and vi.) in conjunction	0	0	2
v.) and vi.) in conjunction	4	0	0
v.) and vii.) in conjunction	2	0	4
vi.), vii.) and viii.) in conjunction	0	0	1
Ongoing	72	0	52
Total	887	1	175

Outcome (TNE programmes) – The phrasing of the penalties has been abbreviated for this report	Plagiarism or collusion	Exam offence	All other misconduct
Case dismissed/withdrawn/returned	2	8	0
i.) formal warning	0	0	0
ii.) failure in element, uncapped resubmission	2	0	0
iii.) failure in element, capped resubmission	5	7	0
iv.) failure in element, resit available if module failed	0	1	0
v.) failure in module, capped resit	0	15	0
vi.) reduction of classification by one level	0	1	0
vii.) Expulsion	0	0	0
Ongoing	8	0	0
Total	17	32	0

1.27 For the non-TNE programmes, penalty iii.) was again by far the most frequently used in 2020-21, with 536 applications to date. 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 97 applications. For the TNE programmes, penalty v.) was the most frequently used. With the recent appointment of numerous new Deputy Academic Misconduct Chairs, work will shortly commence to reconsider the appropriateness of each penalty for particular categories of offence. This will result in revised guidance to support consistency of approach among the now much larger group of Chairs.

1.28 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. Schools and institutes are themselves encouraged to contact the ACCO, as well as the QMA if they require any assistance with determining the best way to support students with the academic misconduct process, and academic integrity more generally.

Report 2: Appeals

Scope

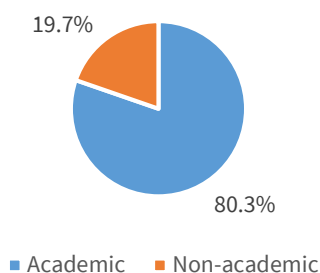
2.1 This report concerns student appeals received in 2020-21; appeals are handled by the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office (ACCO), working in conjunction with the Chairs of the Appeal Panel. They have been broken down into academic and non-academic appeals, but all appeals were conducted under the [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.
 - a. the Academic Misconduct Policy.
 - b. decisions to terminate the registration of a student (including research students).
 - c. the Fitness to Practise and Professional Capability Regulations.
 - d. the Code of Student Discipline.
 - e. disciplinary action taken under the Library Regulations.
 - f. disciplinary action taken under the Halls of Residence Regulations.
 - g. decisions on student bursaries, scholarships, and grants where these are administered by Queen Mary.

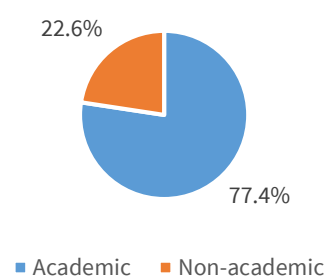
Total case numbers

2.2 Queen Mary received 431 appeals in 2020-21, a significant increase of over 52 per cent on 2019-20 (283 appeals). A rise was expected, and was flagged in last year's Senate report (there were fewer appeals last year, largely as a result of the pandemic contingency measures delaying or removing decisions that might lead to appeal); although some Covid-19 mitigations remained in place in 2020-21, it was welcome to observe that appeals returned more-or-less to pre-pandemic levels, rather than surpassing them. It is clear from the data below, that, under 'normal' circumstances, Queen Mary would anticipate 400 and 500 appeals per academic year. The pie-charts show the breakdown of academic and non-academic appeals in 2020-21 and 2019-20. The table shows the total number of appeals received by academic year over a seven-year period.

2020-21 appeals by type



2019-20 appeals by type



Year	Total 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%

2020-21 431 +52.3% 28,715 1.5%

Breakdown of case numbers

Breakdown by category (academic and non-academic appeals)

2.3 Academic appeals relate to academic issues, most commonly examination board decisions (e.g. progression, classification, marking, deregistration for failure). Appeals of this nature comprise the vast majority of cases. A challenge to academic judgement is not a permitted ground for an appeal, but many appeals are based on a challenge to marks awarded. The number of academic appeals as a percentage of the student returned to the expected level, i.e. between one and two percent.

Academic appeals

Year	Appeals	Change	Student body	As % of student body
2014-15	237	+17.9%	18,905	1.3%
2015-16	259	+8.5%	21,187	1.2%
2016-17	352	+35.9%	23,114	1.5%
2017-18	424	+20.7%	23,792	1.8%
2018-19	437	+3.1%	25,925	1.7%
2019-20	219	-49.9%	27,120	0.9%
2020-21	346	+58.0%	28,715	1.2%

2.4 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. Non-academic appeals increased again in 2020-21; it was noted that they increased in 2019-20 also in the face of a significant overall drop in the total number of appeals received.

Non-academic appeals

Year	Appeals	Change	Student body	As % of student body
2014-15	72	-1.3%	18,905	0.4%
2015-16	59	-18.0%	21,187	0.3%
2016-17	108	+83.0%	23,114	0.5%
2017-18	59	-45.3%	23,792	0.3%
2018-19	55	-6.8%	25,925	0.2%
2019-20	64	+16.4%	27,120	0.2%
2020-21	85	+32.8%	28,715	0.3%

Breakdown by level and year of study

2.5 Breaking down appeal numbers by level of study gives the figures below (2019-20 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. As expected, the percentages demonstrate that there was very little change in terms of this particular metric.

Level of study	Appeals received	As a % of all appeals
Undergraduate and foundation	279 (186)	64.7% (65.7%)
Postgraduate taught	145 (94)	33.6% (33.2%)
Postgraduate research	7 (3)	1.6% (1.1%)
Total	431 (283)	

2.6 The next table breaks down appeals by year of study (2019-20 figures in brackets). There has been some movement between categories since last year, but this is likely attributable to

natural variation. Second-year undergraduates were the highest category in this metric, reversing the figures from last year, when finalists were the highest.

Year of study	Appeals received	As a % of all appeals
Foundation (Year 0)	4 (1)	0.9% (0.4%)
UG year 1	72 (31)	16.7% (11.0%)
UG year 2	98 (41)	22.7% (14.5%)
UG final year	77 (97)	17.9% (34.3%)
UG year 3-5	28 (15)	6.5% (5.3%)
Postgraduate taught	145 (95)	33.6% (33.6%)
Postgraduate research	7 (3)	1.6% (1.1%)
Total	431 (283)	

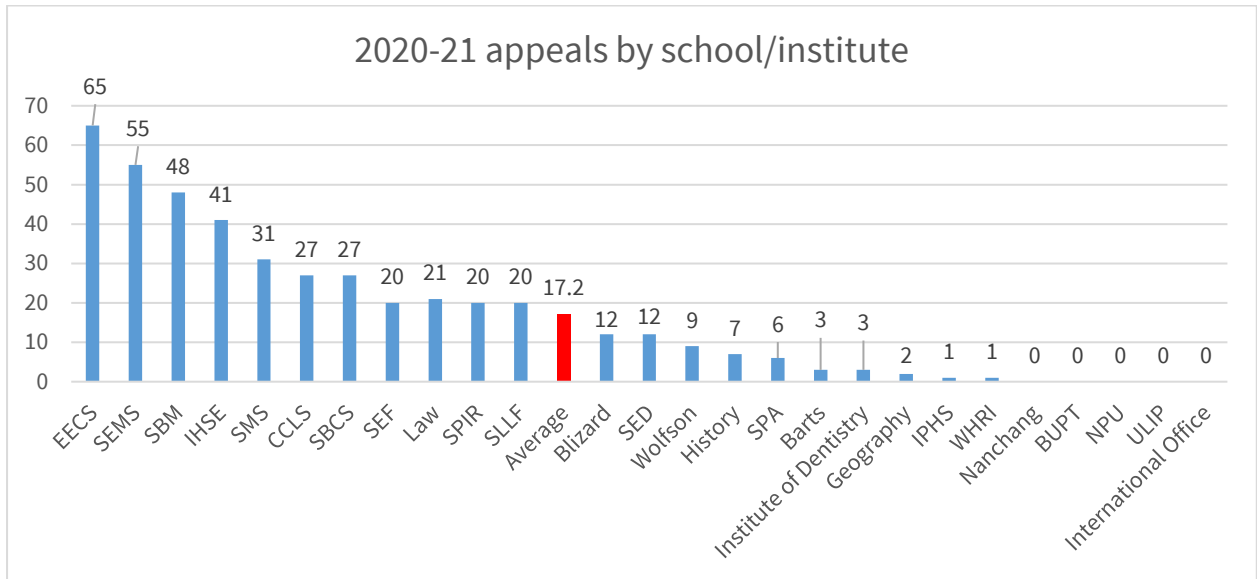
Breakdown by school/institute

2.7 This section of the report looks at the breakdown of cases by school and institute.

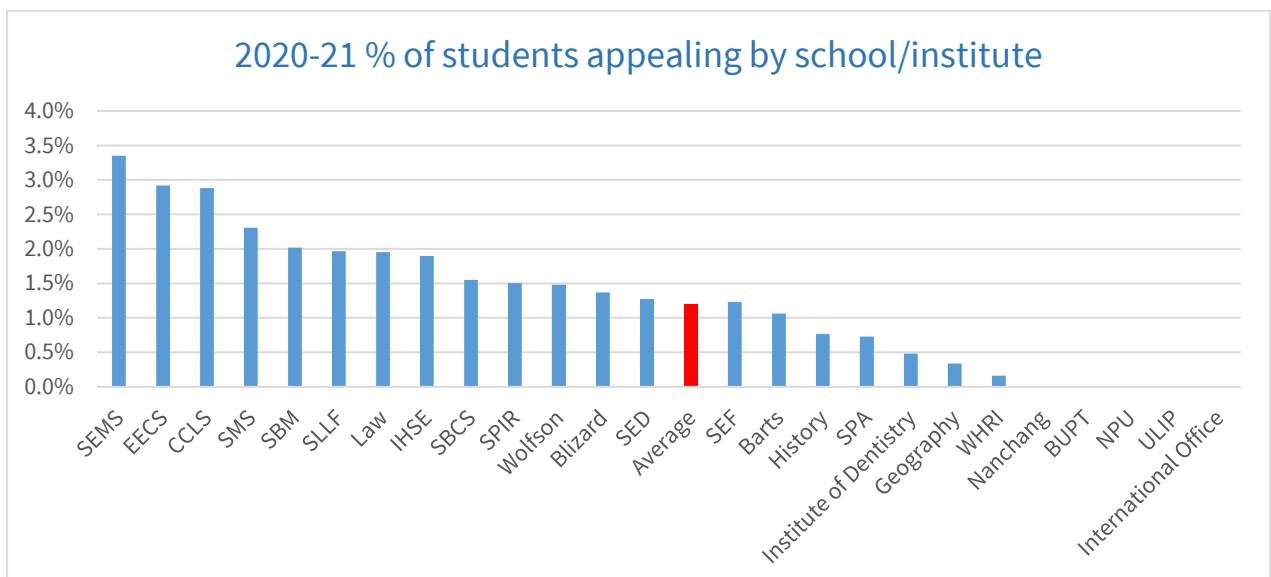
2.8 In raw numbers, Electronic Engineering and Computer Science (15.1% of all appeals), Engineering and Materials Science (12.8%), Business and Management (11.1%), and Health Sciences Education (9.5%) had the most appeals. Mathematical Sciences, CCLS, and the former Biological and Chemical Sciences were next. The remainder of the schools and institutes were all under five percent of the total appeals submitted.

School/institute	2020-21 appeals	% of 2020-21 appeals	2019-20 appeals	+/- 2019-20 to 2020-21
Elec. Eng. & Com. Sci.	65	15.1%	20	45
Engineering and Materials Science	55	12.8%	18	37
Business & Management	48	11.1%	29	19
Health Sciences Education	41	9.5%	25	16
Mathematical Sciences	31	7.2%	20	11
CCLS	27	6.3%	20	7
Biological & Chemical Sciences	27	6.3%	16	11
Economics & Finance	20	4.6%	30	-10
Law	21	4.9%	26	-5
Politics & International Relations	20	4.6%	17	3
Languages, Linguistics & Film	20	4.6%	16	4
Blizard	12	2.8%	4	8
English & Drama	12	2.8%	7	5
Wolfson	9	2.1%	4	5
History	7	1.6%	4	3
Physics & Astronomy	6	1.4%	3	3
Barts	3	0.7%	1	2
Dentistry	3	0.7%	1	2
Geography	2	0.5%	1	1
Population Health Sciences	1	0.2%	1	0
William Harvey	1	0.2%	5	-4
NCU	0	0.0%	8	-8
BUPT	0	0.0%	0	0
NPU	0	0.0%	0	0
ULIP	0	0.0%	0	0

International Office 0 0.0% 7 -7



2.9 While the percentages in the above table have implications in terms of caseload, it can be more useful to consider the percentage of students in each school or institute submitting an appeal, as represented in the graph below. Overall, 1.2% 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

2.10 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 2020-21, 156 appeals were based on alleged procedural

error, 196 on alleged exceptional circumstances, and 68 on both grounds. Eleven appeals failed to specify on what grounds they were appealing. These figures are in keeping with previous years, i.e. the ACCO normally receives more exceptional circumstances appeals than procedural error appeals.

- 2.11 Over one hundred appeals (122) remain unresolved at the time of writing; this represents 28.3% of all appeals received in 2020-21, a percentage that is lower than in previous years. Although the long-standing backlog was shrinking quite quickly in the first half of 2021, the sharp increase in academic misconduct for the 2020-21 academic year had an impact on the ACCO's ability to complete all academic appeals by the summer of 2021.
- 2.12 The general content of appeals received by the ACCO remains more or less unchanged from previous years. Common issues raised (with or without merit) include:
- a. An assessment mark was incorrect, because it did not accord with the student's view of their own performance, or a mark was incorrect because it was out of line with the student's other results.
 - b. Marking was not conducted in line with the published procedures.
 - c. Poor feedback or supervision led to a lower mark than the student felt they should have achieved.
 - d. Administrative errors in the calculation or recording of marks.
 - e. Assessment or award outcomes had been impaired by extenuating circumstances that, because of other exceptional circumstances, were either not made known at the proper time for good reason, or were not properly considered. Such appeals typically relate to mental health and alleged impaired judgement or ability to engage. A significant proportion of these appeals involve the 'fit to sit' policy, where students who submitted or sat an assessment claimed that they were unfit to determine their fitness at the time; it is notable that this claim is almost always made only after the publication of official results.
 - f. Alleged good reason for the non-payment of fees which had led to deregistration.
- 2.13 An electronic case management system is in the final stages of development and the 2021-22 report should contain some data of the impact of that system on the appeal process.
- 2.14 The table below details the outcomes of 2020-21 appeals, side-by-side with the 2019-20 figures. This table includes appeals not yet concluded. Although the number of upheld appeals remains very low, it must be noted that the number of appeals that have been 'resolved outside the process' has significantly increased; almost a three-fold increase in terms of the percentage of total appeals. This figure is notable because such appeals are overwhelmingly resolved in the student's favour. The two main issues addressed in this way are the correction of simple errors, such as a mark entry error, and appeals where the exceptional circumstances named in the appeal clearly warrant the student's ECs being further considered by the appropriate SEB. Resolving an appeal outside the process benefits appellants since it delivers faster outcomes in those instances where it is an appropriate course of action, and also frees up the casework team to focus on other appeals that require a full process.

Outcome	2020-21 (% of cases)	2019-20 (% of cases)
Ongoing at time of report	122 (28.3%)	167 (59.0%)
Upheld	3 (0.7%)	3 (1.1%)
Not upheld	47 (10.9%)	23 (8.1%)
Automatic rejection	97 (22.5%)	21 (7.4%)

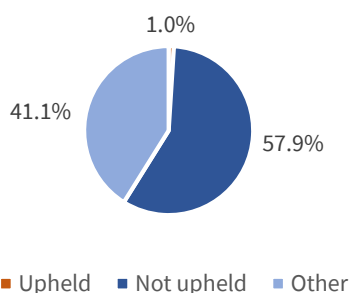
Out of time (process completed)	35 (8.1%)	19 (6.7%)
Resolved outside process	120 (27.8%)	30 (10.6%)
Withdrawn by student	7 (1.6%)	20 (7.1%)
Total	431	283

2.15 This table shows the outcomes only for 2020-21 cases that have been resolved; the ongoing cases have been removed.

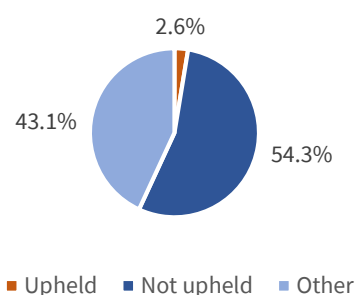
Outcome	2020-21 (% of cases)	2019-20 (% of cases)
Upheld	3 (0.7%)	3 (1.1%)
Not upheld: heard and rejected	47 (10.9%)	23 (8.1%)
Not upheld: automatic rejection	97 (22.5%)	21 (7.4%)
Not upheld: out of time	35 (8.1%)	19 (6.7%)
Other: resolved outside process	120 (27.8%)	30 (10.6%)
Other: withdrawn by student	7 (1.6%)	20 (7.1%)
Total	309	116

2.16 The following charts visualise the same data, using only the broader top-level outcomes. 29.4% percent of cases were resolved without going through the appeal process.

2020-21 appeal outcomes
(resolved cases only)



2019-20 appeal outcomes
(resolved cases only)



Appeal completion times

2.17 The Queen Mary [Appeal Policy](#) states 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.

2.18 The following table gives data on the time taken to resolve cases in 2020-21, side-by-side with the same data from 2019-20:

Time taken to resolve cases	2020-21 (%)	2019-20 (%)
Resolved within two months	136 (31.6%)	68 (24.0%)
Resolved in over two months	173 (40.1%)	48 (17.0%)
Unresolved at time of report	122 (28.3%)	167 (59.0%)

2.19 It is notable that the number of cases resolved within two months, as outlined by the [Appeal Policy](#), has seen a small rise. In terms of appeals that extend beyond the two-month deadline, when taken together the proportion of cases resolved in longer than two months

and the proportion unresolved is very high (68.4%). It is worth repeating that this provides a poor experience for students and for staff, including staff dealing with the appeals. However, there is optimism within the ACCO that the resolution of this perennial issue is within grasp, as discussed below.

- 2.20 The long-standing issue of high case volume for the ACCO is well known, however, last year's report did note that there was some hope that all appeals would be cleared by the summer of 2021. As noted above, this proved to be impossible due to the significant spike in academic misconduct, which is the subject of a separate report. That said, it is anticipated that outstanding appeal cases will be cleared by the summer of 2022, and that from the 2022-23 academic year onwards, the ACCO will be able to process a significant majority of the appeals received within the stated two-month timeframe. These improvements in faster turnaround times will be achieved through a combination of factors detailed below.
- 2.21 It was noted in the 2019-20 report that a great many appeals received by the ACCO are without merit, but still require detailed consideration. To that end, in the summer of 2021 a change was made to the [Appeal Policy](#), after recommendation by EQSB and approval by Senate, whereby the Head of the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office is able to authorise the automatic rejection of appeals for cases with no grounds for an appeal. This change has had a significant and positive impact on the appeal process, in so far as students have been receiving outcomes faster than they otherwise would have, whilst the student casework team has been able to more rapidly process those appeals requiring a full process, i.e. consideration by a Chair. Students whose appeals are considered to be without merit are still able to request a final review, and to date, none of the automatic rejection decisions have been overturned at the review stage.
- 2.22 As noted above, many appeals can and should be resolved informally, through discussion between the student and their school/institute. In such cases there is no reason for the student to utilise the formal appeal process, e.g. 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. The opportunity for informal discussion between school/institute was the intention behind the use of results surgeries, recommended by Senate, with the intention of local resolution wherever possible. 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 for Higher Education (OIA).
- 2.23 It has previously been reported that the appeal process is largely manual, as are all student casework processes. The Covid-19 pandemic expedited the shift to paperless files, and this transition went very smoothly indeed. It is expected that the imminent implementation of an electronic casework management system will have further positive impacts on the appeal process.
- 2.24 Resourcing in the ACCO has improved and should in the coming months have further positive impacts on all types of casework. In conjunction with last year's changes to the [Appeal Policy](#) and the incoming electronic casework management system, there is real optimism within the ACCO that the 2021-22 report will show that Queen Mary has been able to take significant strides towards achieving the timelines stipulated in the [Appeal Policy](#).

That said, it is worth reiterating that the need for a more robust 'informal resolution' stage at the local level and prior to the submission of an appeal remains the same. In terms of improving student processes, this development will be the ACCO's number one priority for the remainder of the 2021-22 academic year and beyond.

- 2.25 The ACCO would like to offer its sincere thanks on the record to those members of academic staff who stepped forward in the past 12 months to take up a role as a Chair of the Appeal Panel. There are now eighteen Chairs working with the ACCO, from across the University, and without whom the casework team would find it difficult, if not impossible, to achieve acceptable turnaround times when processing appeals.

Final Review, and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education

- 2.26 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 ACCO and considered by a nominee of the Principal (currently the acting Academic Registrar).
- 2.27 There have been 33 requests for Final Review to date from appeals submitted in the 2020-21 academic year, 15 of which have been resolved at the time of writing. Of those 15 that have been resolved, 14 were rejected and 1 was resolved outside the process. This is partial data, however, as 122 cases remain unresolved, many of which could go to Final Review.
- 2.28 A request for a Final Review marks the end of Queen Mary's internal appeal process. A student who remains 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.

Report 3: Complaints, Disciplinary Misconduct, 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 common themes. Although fewer in number, these cases are often complex in nature and usually take more time to resolve.

Complaints

3.2 In the 2020-21 academic year, the Queen Mary [Student Complaints Policy](#) had 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 (ACCO). Decisions at Stage 2 are taken by a Complaints Assessor, appointed from among the academic staff. Decisions at Stage 3 are taken by a Principal's nominee. If a student remains unsatisfied after Stage 3, they have recourse to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).

3.3 This report covers complaints made at institutional level, Stages 2 and 3. Schools and institutes handle cases at Stage 1. The casework management system that it is anticipated will be implemented in the near future will allow cases to be tracked more effectively at each stage, an increasing requirement for external reporting on complaints; it is important that Queen Mary has a system that efficiently allows the gathering of data from across the institution.

3.4 The [Student Complaints Policy](#) was amended for the 2021-22 academic year, following approval by EQSB and Senate. The number of formal stages was reduced from three to two, aligning the policy with relevant, sector wide good practice guides. It is noted that the emphasis on informal resolution remains and has been highlighted in the new policy; Queen Mary does receive a relatively small number of formal complaints, which suggests that local intervention does work well. The ACCO provides advice to schools and institutes where required, and increased effort has been made, and will continue to be made, on building and maintaining this network of support.

Complaints: numbers and nature

3.5 In 2020-21, the ACCO received 29 Stage 2 complaints. This is more than the previous two years – 2019-20 (21), 2018-19 (23) – but fewer than the number received in 2017-18 (33). It should be noted that numbers of complaints tend to fluctuate.

3.6 The complaints considered in 2020-21 were non-academic in nature, by a significant majority; 21 of the 29 were non-academic complaints.

3.7 Those complaints that were solely non-academic in nature concerned:

- Maintenance issues in halls of residence (2)
- Industrial action and/or Covid-19 provision (9)
- Inadequate non-academic support (3)
- Residential housing fees (4)
- Dissatisfaction with the Queen Mary disciplinary process (1)
- Allegations of bullying against Queen Mary staff (1)
- Loss of property caused by Queen Mary whilst resident (1)

There was a notable spike in the number of complaints that referenced Covid-19 provision in 2020-21; this spike was expected and flagged as a possibility in the 2019-20 report. It is noted that the nine complaints referred to in point two immediately above generally referred to both industrial action and Covid-19 provision in order to provide further context for their complaint. In broad terms, these students cited a refund as their preferred outcome. The Stage 1 complaint process was fundamental in these cases, as consideration at the local level allowed schools and institutes to assess complaints in relation to teaching and learning, to check what had been delivered, and to ascertain whether students had missed any learning opportunities or may have been disadvantaged in a different way; this approach was advised by the relevant [QAA guidance](#).

3.8 Those complaints that were solely academic in nature concerned:

- Dissatisfaction with QMPlus (1)
- Dissatisfaction with the programme in general (4)
- Inadequate doctoral supervision (1)
- Dissatisfaction with the academic guidance provided by Queen Mary academic members of staff (2)

Complaints: outcomes and timescales

3.9 At the time of writing, eight Stage 2 complaints remain under investigation. Of the completed Stage 2 complaints, one complaint was partially upheld, whilst two were resolved informally after intervention by the ACCO. Six Stage 2 complaints in 2020-21 were not upheld and 11 were rejected as being out of time. One complaint was transferred to another Queen Mary professional services directorate.

3.10 The average time taken to resolve a complaint at Stage 2 in 2019-20 was 58 calendar days. This is a significant drop from 2019-20 (98), however, eight complaints remain under investigation. The figure of 58 calendar days is lower than each of the past four academic years; 2018-19 (127), 2017-18 (122), and 2016-17 (72). 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 timely processing of complaints is the key focus of the ACCO for this category of casework. 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. It is noted that the changes made to the Student Complaints Policy for the 2021-22 academic year, in particular the change from three formal stages to two, should in the long run have a positive impact on complaint processing times.

3.12 The figures below indicate the time taken to resolve Stage 2 complaints in 2020-21:

Time taken to resolve complaint	2020-21(2019-20)
Within 30 days	9 (2)
Between 30 and 90 days	5 (4)
More than 90 days	7 (14)
Ongoing	8 (2)

3.13 Only three Stage 2 complaints were escalated to Stage 3 in 2020-21, a sharp drop from 2019-20 when 12 Stage 2 complaints were escalated to the review stage. This was a return to the level seen in 2018-19 when only four were escalated. Of the three Stage 3 complaints considered in 2020-21, all were rejected.

Complaints: equalities data and breakdowns

3.14 Full equalities data has not been included as numbers are small and could allow identification of individual cases. Seventeen of the 29 Stage 2 complainants were female, 12 were male. White students were the ethnic group with the highest representation; 13 of the 29 were white, whilst 20 of the 29 were classified as home students. The School of Electronic Engineering and Computer Science was disproportionately represented in the data with seven Stage 2 complaints, or just under one quarter of the total.

Disciplinary misconduct

- 3.15 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. The ACCO holds only institutional level data, and it is intended that the aforementioned electronic casework system will allow for better reporting. Institutional level cases are normally investigated by the ACCO, which ultimately reports to the acting Academic Registrar and a Vice-Principal who then determine whether to proceed with the case. If the case does proceed, a 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 will have recourse to the OIA if they remain unsatisfied with the outcome of the process.
- 3.16 Nineteen allegations of disciplinary misconduct were received by the ACCO in 2020-21, which is more than double the nine allegations received in 2019-20. This figure did not quite reach the peak of 24 received in 2018-19 but remains significantly higher than the figures seen in 2017-18 (11) and 2016-17 (10). Two of the 19 allegations received in 2020-21 are still under investigation.
- 3.17 As noted in previous reports, 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.
- 3.18 The 19 allegations received in 2020-21 featured the following behaviour:
- a. Inappropriate behaviour on social media (8)
 - b. Sexual misconduct (3)
 - c. Inappropriate student behaviour towards Queen Mary staff (3)
 - d. Inappropriate student behaviour towards other Queen Mary student/s, including bullying and harassment (3)
 - e. research misconduct (2)
- 3.19 Of the 19 allegations investigated by the ACCO in 2020-21, it was decided by the acting Academic Registrar and a Vice-Principal that three should be dismissed and that five should not be subject to any further action; several of these latter cases involved the recommendation of some sort of informal action, as allowed by the Code. Six allegations were upheld by a Student Disciplinary Committee. Three allegations had to be abandoned since the students left Queen Mary before a resolution could be reached. As noted, two cases are ongoing.
- 3.20 Where cases were proven at Panel, penalties awarded included reprimands, formal and final warnings, requirements for students to make apologies, requirements for students to undertake specific training, and restrictions from holding particular student offices.
- 3.21 Queen Mary has continued to use a specialist external investigator for cases involving allegations of sexual misconduct. This practice was instigated in order to better support all parties, and to try to conclude investigations as quickly as possible. Additionally, the Code of Student Discipline was amended for the 2021-22 academic year to improve the process for handling allegations of this kind. The impacts of these changes will feature heavily in next year's report. The introduction of [Report + Support](#) continues to prove 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,

ACCO makes clear that it will investigate any allegations irrespective of how these are raised. 'Conduct alerts' continue to be issued by schools/institutes to deal with low-level misconduct that would be better dealt with outside a formal disciplinary process.

- 3.22 Allegations of disciplinary misconduct involving the use of social media are rising, and it is worth noting that similar occurrences have continued into the current academic year (2021-22). Such allegations present some issues, in so far as the behaviour itself is completely detached from any Queen Mary activity.

[Discipline: equalities data and breakdown](#)

- 3.23 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

- 3.24 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 ACCO administers the Fitness to Practice 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.
- 3.25 Queen Mary heard two fitness to practise cases in the 2020-21 academic year; both cases were proven. Further details and equalities data cannot be included here without risking the identification of the students. There was one fitness to practise case in each of 2019-20 and 2018-19, in 2017-18 there were two.