



Senate

Paper Title	Student Casework Reports 2021-22
Outcome requested	Senate is asked to consider the annual report on student casework for 2021-22
Points for Senate members 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>The reports include the number of cases in each category, outcomes, key themes and turnaround times. Senate is asked to note the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That allegations of academic misconduct have continued to rise with a 29% increase in referrals to the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office (ACCO), following a 77% increase in 2020-21 and a 67% increase in 2019-2020. 2. The number of appeals received in 2021-22 rose to the highest number recorded; 769 appeals were received in 2021-22. 3. The number of complaints at various stages considered by the ACCO was 19, which is generally in keeping with previous years' totals. 4. The number of disciplinary matters dealt with by the ACCO was recorded as 13 for 2021-22. 5. No fitness to practise hearings took place in 2021-22. 6. An electronic casework management system will be in place for the 2022-23 academic year.
Questions for Senate to consider	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To consider approaches for reducing the number of academic misconduct allegations through assessment design, appropriate support for students and amendments to the current process for handling cases; for example, it might be beneficial for schools and institutes to handle first offences locally for non-finalists. 2. To consider approaches for the enhancement of the informal stage of the appeal process and the importance of providing results surgeries.
Regulatory/statutory reference points	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Office for Students: Conditions of Registration – B2, B4, C2 2. Office of the Independent Adjudicator: The Good Practice Framework

	3. QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education
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	Education Quality and Standards Board – 25 January 2023 Senate – 15 March 2023 Council – 18 May 2023
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Sponsor	Jonathan Morgan, Chief Governance Officer and University Secretary

Student Casework Reports 2021-22

Report 1: Academic misconduct

Scope

- 1.1 This report covers cases of academic misconduct considered under the [Academic Misconduct Policy](#).
- 1.2 The [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) defined the following as academic misconduct in 2021-22:
 - 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 the Directorate of Governance and Legal Services (DGLS), specifically the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office (ACCO) for investigation. First allegations of academic misconduct 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 intended that the imminent implementation of an online academic misconduct casework management system – situated in MySIS and modelled on the extenuating circumstances system – will consolidate this knowledge in one place.

Total case numbers

- 1.3 The ACCO received 1,440 distinct allegations of academic misconduct in 2021-22. 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 assessments in 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
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%
2021-22	1,440	+29%	32,207	4.5%

- 1.5 The number of cases relative to the total student body remains low (but significant), however, this is the seventh consecutive year this figure 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. The move to online assessments is perhaps the most obvious reason for this rise, and the ACCO understands that Queen Mary is not alone in facing this issue. Consideration must be given to where online assessment fits in with broader assessment strategies, in a way that minimises the capacity for students to commit academic misconduct; the recently established EQSB sub-board would be a natural home to lead this discussion, but the problem is far larger than a single group can solve.
- 1.6 In 2021-22, the ACCO received 935 allegations related to UG students and 505 to PGT students. This represents an incidence of 4.2% among UG students (up from 3.8% in 2020-21) and 6.9% among PGT students (up from 5.5% in 2020-21).

Breakdown of case numbers

Breakdown by category of alleged misconduct

- 1.7 The 1,440 allegations of academic misconduct processed by the ACCO in 2021-22 can be broken down into the following categories:

Allegation	No. cases	of which UG	of which PGT
Plagiarism	734	450	284
Collusion	632	427	205
Exam misconduct – all types	20	20	0
Use or attempted use of a ghost writing service	25	16	9
Fraudulent reporting of source material	8	7	1
Multiple allegations	21	15	6
Total	1,440	935	505

- 1.8 Central investigations of allegations of all kinds have increased across the board, but this is wholly expected given the increase seen in the 2021-22 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 misconduct	Multiple misconduct type	Ghost-writing or other	2021-22 total	% of 2021-22 cases
0 (Foundation)	6	0	0	3	9	0.63%
1	350	7	5	10	372	25.83%
2	323	9	7	7	346	24.03%
3 (if not final year)	11	3	0	0	14	0.97%
4 (if not final year)	0	1	0	0	1	0.07%
5 (if not final year)	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Undergraduate finalist	187	0	3	3	193	13.40%
Taught postgraduate	489	0	6	10	505	35.07%
Total	1366	20	21	33	1440	100%

Breakdown by school/institute

1.10 The table provides a breakdown of cases in 2021-22 by school/institute and study level. It also includes the percentage increase/decrease from the 2020-21 academic year.

School/institute	2021-22 cases (2020-21)	% change from 2020-21	UG cases	PGT cases
Business and Management	338 (226)	50%	189	149
Elec. Eng. & Com. Science (inc. BUPT)	232 (109)	113%	143	89
Engineering & Materials Science (inc. NPU)	134 (99)	35%	86	48
Politics and International Relations	118 (76)	55%	86	32
Economics and Finance	114 (40)	185%	69	45
Biological and Behavioural Sciences (inc. Nanchang)	111 (127)	-13%	103	8
Mathematical Sciences	75 (148)	-49%	75	0
Centre for Commercial Law Studies	64 (59)	8%	0	64
Physical and Chemical Sciences	56 (50)	12%	46	10
Wolfson Institute of Population Health	41 (16)	156%	1	40
Languages, Linguistics and Film	34 (27)	26%	32	2
History	33 (18)	83%	33	0
English and Drama	24 (25)	-4%	24	0
Geography	23 (26)	-12%	20	3
Law	14 (10)	40%	14	0
Blizard Institute	9 (7)	29%	0	9
Institute of Dentistry	8 (5)	60%	7	1
Institute of Health Sciences Education	5 (1)	400%	4	1
Barts Cancer Institute	3 (17)	-82%	0	3
William Harvey Research Institute	1 (19)	-95%	0	1
University of London Institute in Paris	3 (0)	n/a	3	0
Total	1,440		935	505

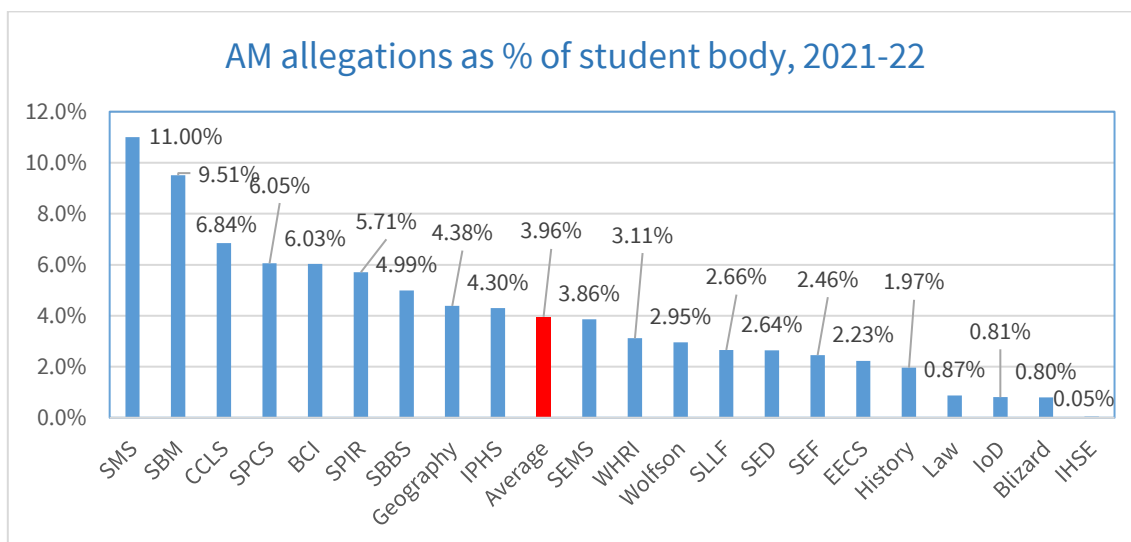
In some schools/institutes, the increase in the number of cases is significant:

- The School of Economics and Finance saw a 185% increase of
- The Wolfson Institute of Population Health saw a 156% increase
- The School of Electronic Engineering & Computer Science (inc. BUPT) saw a 113% increase
- The School of Business and Management saw a 50% increase

In others, there was a significant decrease:

- The School of Mathematical Sciences saw a decrease in cases of 49%

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

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.

1.14 In addition, the Queen Mary Academy, with input from various stakeholders including the ACCO, has developed an online academic integrity module that all students are strongly encouraged to complete on QMPlus. This University wide module was designed to address the general principles of academic integrity and will hopefully see the number of cases reduce for the 2022-23. In-person training, such as those sessions offered by the Library, remain in place.

Investigations and turnaround times

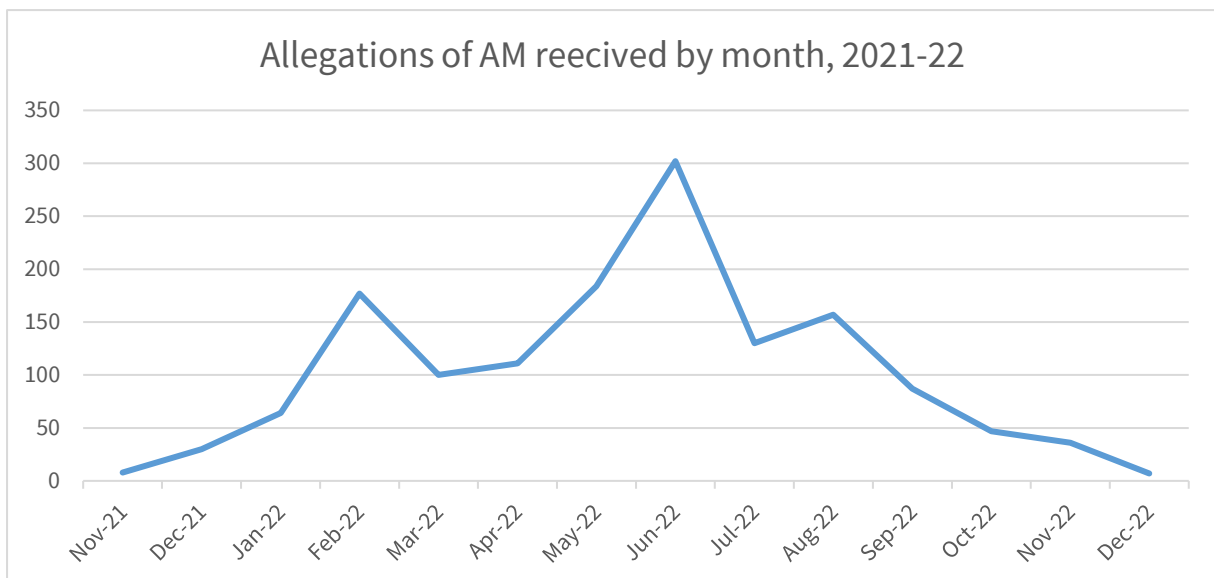
1.15 All students accused of committing academic misconduct were given an opportunity to respond to the allegations in writing. Students were provided with evidence relating to the concern at the same time as they were informed of the allegation by the ACCO.

1.16 Where a student accepts or does not deny the allegation of misconduct (either by statement or by failing to respond) the case is heard by a 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 2021-22 was 114 calendar days. This is a significant increase on the last academic year, and continues the trend of rising average completion times: 2020-21 (102), 2019-20 (76), 2018-19 (63) and 2017-18 (54). This rising figure is wholly expected given the last three year-on-year increases.

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 ACCO.

1.19 The volume of academic misconduct cases received in 2021-22 has overwhelmed the ACCO in 2021-22; this increase in workload has had a significant detrimental effect on other student casework processes the ACCO is responsible for, such as student appeals, which have also seen significant increases in casework numbers. The repercussions of the increase in numbers of cases, and the impact on turnaround times, will be experienced for some time to come.



1.20 Since the summer of 2020, the ACCO has been recruiting as many Deputy Chairs as possible. This has continued in recent months, and has been a welcome change, however, the sheer volume of allegations reported since 2019-20 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 1,500 and 1,700 allegations of academic misconduct in 2022-23. However, with the re-introduction of some invigilated exams in 2022-23 this figure will hopefully see a reduction in numbers. 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. Further discussions are required to discuss ways to address the volume of academic misconduct allegations and it is clear that only a multi-faceted approach will have any serious impact on the numbers.
- 1.23 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 1.22 from being realised.

Case outcomes

- 1.24 At the time of writing, 536 of the 1,440 allegations reported to the ACCO in 2021-22 are outstanding; 904 allegations have been resolved to date. It was found that academic misconduct had occurred in 807 of those 904 cases, which equates to 89.3%. The remaining cases were resolved as follows: 49 allegations were dismissed (5.4%); 18 allegations were withdrawn by the reporting school/institute (2.0%); and 30 were returned to school/institute by ACCO for a lack of evidence in support (3.3%).
- 1.25 Where a student is found guilty of misconduct, the Chair/Deputy 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, non-concurrent offences, a more severe penalty will normally be applied on each occasion.
- 1.26 The tables below show detailed outcomes of cases referred to the ACCO in 2021-22. The TNE programmes have a different set of penalties, so have been split into a separate table.

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	92	0	5
i.) formal reprimand	25	2	0
ii.) element of assessment capped	111	2	0
iii.) fail element, capped resubmission, same attempt	338	4	8
iv.) module capped	35	2	0
v.) fail module, capped resit, subsequent attempt	235	1	2
vi.) fail module with no right to resit/retake	18	0	4
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	0	0	0
i.) and iii.) in conjunction	1	0	0
i.) and v.) in conjunction	0	0	0
i.) and vi.) in conjunction	0	0	0
v.) and vi.) in conjunction	0	0	0
v.) and vii.) in conjunction	1	0	0
vi.), vii.) and viii.) in conjunction	0	0	0
Ongoing	505	0	14
Total	1361	15	33

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	0	0	0
i.) formal warning	0	1	0
ii.) failure in element, uncapped resubmission	0	0	0
iii.) failure in element, capped resubmission	0	0	0
iv.) failure in element, resit available if module failed	4	1	0
v.) failure in module, capped resit	2	6	0
vi.) reduction of classification by one level	0	0	0
vii.) Expulsion	0	0	0
v.) and vi.) in conjunction	3	1	0
Ongoing	13	0	0
Total	22	9	0

1.27 For the non-TNE programmes, penalty iii.) was again by far the most frequently used in 2021-22, with 450 applications to date, this is down on 2020-21 (338). 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 238 applications (97 in 2020-21). For the TNE programmes, penalty v.) was the most frequently used again in 2021-22. The changes in the above figures are a result of revised guidance to support consistency of approach among the now much larger group of Chairs. Ongoing work is still required to maintain consistency.

1.28 Students found to have committed plagiarism are advised to seek advice from their school/institute on avoiding plagiarism in future, are advised of support on academic practice offered by Student and Academic Services, and are advised to complete Queen Mary's Academic Integrity online module. 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

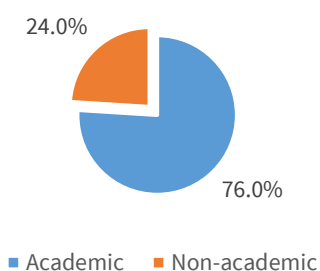
- 2.1 This report concerns student appeals received across the University in 2021-22; appeals are handled by the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office (ACCO), working in conjunction with the Chairs of the Appeal Panel. They have been broken down into academic and non-academic appeals, but all appeals were conducted under the [Appeal Policy](#), under which students may 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.

Total case numbers

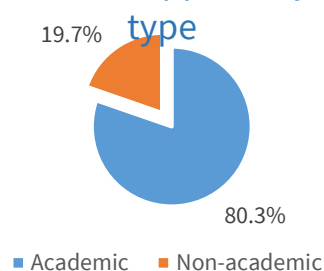
- 2.2 Queen Mary received 769 appeals in 2021-22, a dramatic increase of 78 per cent on 2020-21's figures (431 appeals), and representing 272% of 2019-20 annual total of 283 appeals. From the data presented below, pre-pandemic, Queen Mary was receiving fewer than 500 appeals per academic year. Student appeals in 2021-22 have therefore very significantly exceeded pre-pandemic volumes of appeals. Future reports will need to determine if this is a temporary, or more permanent annual increase.

The pie-charts show the breakdown of academic and non-academic appeals in 2021-22 compared with 2020-21. The table shows the total number of appeals received by academic year over an eight-year period.

2021-22 appeals by type



2020-21 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%
2021-22	769	+78.4%	32,207	2.4%

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. Despite the major increase in the number of academic appeals in 2021-22, viewed as a percentage of an enlarged student body, their volume remains broadly at pre-pandemic level, i. e. between one and two percent of all enrolled students at Queen Mary.

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%
2022-21	585	+69.0%	32,207	1.8%

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 very significantly in 2021-22, even beyond the increase in academic appeals.

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%
2021-22	184	+116%	32,207	0.6%

Breakdown by level and year of study

2.5 Breaking down appeal numbers by level of study gives the figures below (2020-21 figures in brackets).

Level of study	Appeals received	As a % of all appeals
Undergraduate and foundation	557 (279)	72.4% (64.7%)
Postgraduate taught	211 (145)	27.4% (33.6%)
Postgraduate research	1 (7)	0.2% (1.6%)
Total	769 (431)	

2.6 The next table breaks down appeals by year of study (2020-21 figures in brackets). There has been significant movement between categories since last year. While taught postgraduates were again the highest category in this metric, the same as last year, year 2 undergraduates surprisingly come second, there being almost twice as many as final year undergraduates.

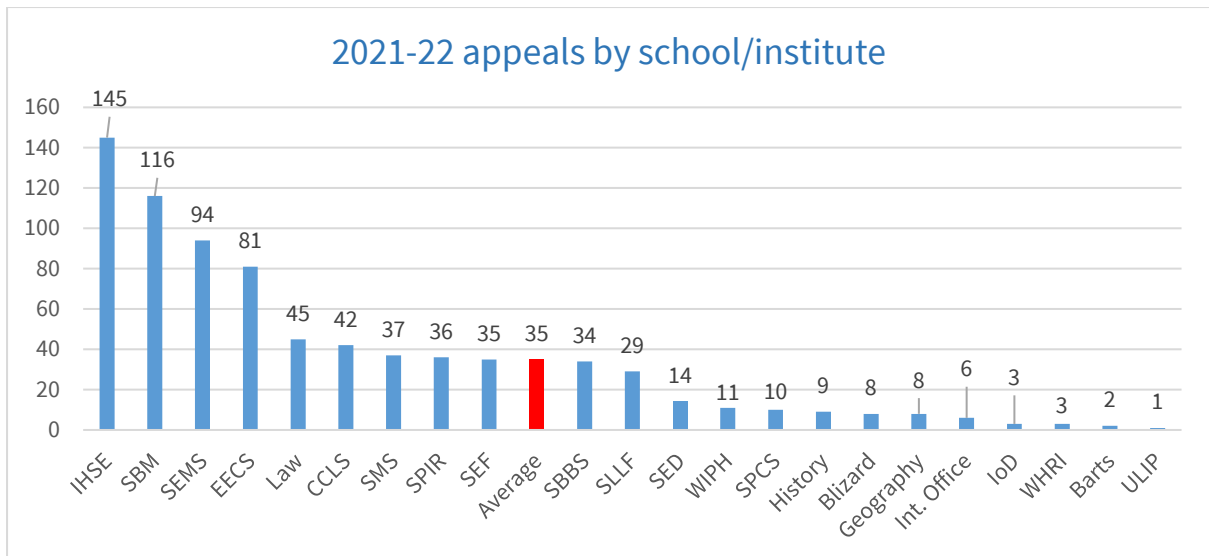
Year of study	Appeals received	As a % of all appeals
Foundation (Year 0)	6 (4)	0.8% (0.9%)
UG year 1	168 (72)	21.8% (16.7%)
UG year 2	182 (98)	23.7% (22.7%)
UG final year	96 (77)	12.5% (17.9%)
UG year 3-5	101 (28)	13.1% (6.5%)
Postgraduate taught	215 (145)	28.0% (33.6%)
Postgraduate research	1 (7)	0.1% (1.6%)
Total	769 (431)	

Breakdown by school/institute

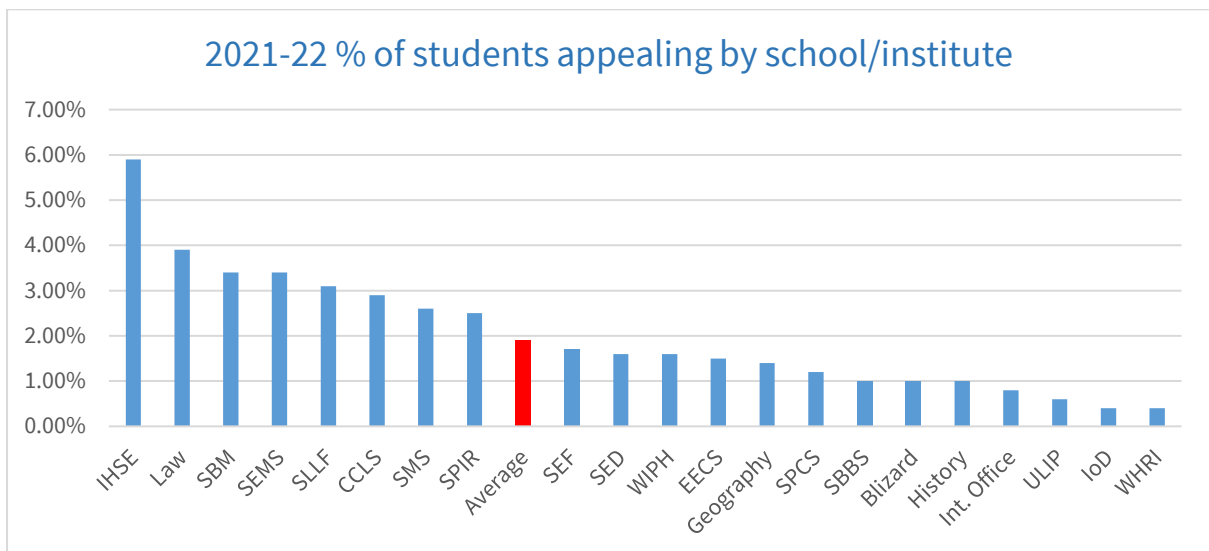
2.7 This section of the report looks at the breakdown of cases by school and institute.

2.8 In raw numbers, the Institute of Health Education (19% of all appeals), the Schools of Business and Management (15%) and Engineering and Materials Sciences (12%) had the most appeals. The Schools of Law and Engineering of Materials Science, and the Centre for Commercial Law Studies were next. The remainder of the schools and institutes were each at or below five percent of the total appeals submitted.

School/institute	2021-22 appeals	% of 2021-22 appeals	2020-21 appeals	+/- 2020-1 to 2021-22
Inst. Health Sciences Education	145	18.9%	41	104
Business & Management	116	15.1%	48	68
Engineering and Materials Science	94	12.2%	55	39
Elec. Eng. & Com. Sci.	81	10.5%	65	16
Law	45	5.5%	21	24
CCLS	42	5.5%	27	15
Mathematical Sciences	37	4.8%	31	6
Politics & International Relations	36	4.7%	20	16
Economics & Finance	35	4.6%	20	15
Biological & Behavioural Sciences	34	4.4%	27	7
Languages, Linguistics & Film	29	3.8%	20	9
English & Drama	14	1.8%	12	2
Wolfson Inst. Population Health	11	1.44%	10	1
Physical & Chemical Sciences	10	1.3%	6	4
History	9	1.2%	7	2
Blizard	8	1%	12	-4
Geography	8	1%	2	6
International Office	6	0.8%	0	6
Dentistry	3	0.4%	3	0
William Harvey Research Institute	3	0.4%	1	2
Barts	2	0.3%	3	-1
ULIP	1	0.1%	0	1



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, 2.4% of Queen Mary students submitted an appeal. The following are substantially above that baseline: Institute of Health Studies (5.9%), Law (3.9%), Business & Management (3.4%), Engineering and Materials Science (3.4%). Languages, Linguistics & Literature (3.1%), CCLS (2.9%), Mathematical Sciences (2.6%), and Politics & International Relations (2.5%) are also above the average. 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 2021-22, 273 appeals were based on alleged procedural error, 382 on alleged exceptional circumstances, and 91 on both grounds. Twenty-three 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 two hundred and fifty appeals (278) remain unresolved at the time of writing; this represents 36.2% of all appeals received in 2021-22. While the long-standing backlog of unresolved appeal cases from academic years before 2021-22 has now been cleared, the radical increase in academic misconduct for the 2021-22 academic year has inevitably had a sustained impact on the ACCO's ability to complete all new academic appeals within the ideal two-month timeframe.
- 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. The impact of the marking boycott in summer 2022 was raised in a number of cases; no appeals referencing the marking boycott have at the time of writing been upheld.
 - 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. The Covid-19 pandemic in 2020-21 was also mentioned widely as a significant destabilising factor in many student's lives.
 - f. Alleged good reason for the non-payment of fees which had led to deregistration.
- 2.13 An electronic case management system remains in development; future reports should contain some data of the (hopefully positive) impact of that system on the appeal process. Serious consideration needs to be given to a process whereby a student must their appeal signed off by their school or institute, where appropriate.
- 2.14 The table below details the outcomes of 2021-22 appeals, side-by-side with the 2020-21 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 extenuating circumstances are clearly worthy of being upheld. In terms of the latter, schools and institutes are approached directly by the ACCO in order to ascertain whether or not it is possible to resolve the appeal in this way. This benefits all appellants since it delivers faster outcomes to those who qualify, and also frees up the casework team to focus on other appeals that require a full process.

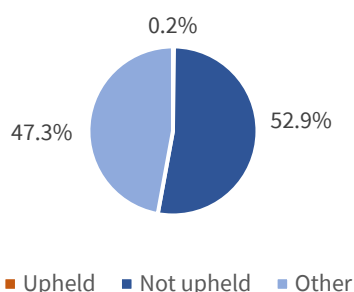
Outcome	2021-22 (% of cases)	2020-21 (% of cases)
Ongoing at time of report	278 (36.2%)	122 (28.3%)
Upheld	1 (0.1%)	3 (0.7%)
Not upheld	7 (0.9%)	47 (10.9%)
Rejection	214 (12.6%)	97 (22.5%)
Out of time (process completed)	37 (6.9%)	35 (8.1%)
Resolved outside process	216 (23.7%)	120 (27.8%)
Withdrawn by student	16 (2.1%)	7 (1.6%)
Total	769	431

2.15 This table shows the outcomes only for 2021-22 cases that have been resolved; the ongoing cases have been removed.

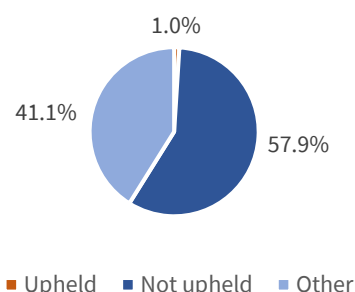
Outcome	2021-22 (% of cases)	2020-21 (% of cases)
Upheld	1 (0.2%)	3 (0.7%)
Not upheld: heard and rejected	7 (1.4%)	47 (10.9%)
Not upheld: rejection	214 (44%)	97 (22.5%)
Not upheld: out of time	37 (7.5%)	35 (8.1%)
Other: resolved outside process	216 (44%)	120 (27.8%)
Other: withdrawn by student	16 (3.3%)	7 (1.6%)
Total	491	309

2.16 The following charts visualise the same data, using only the broader top-level outcomes. Notably, 44% percent of cases were resolved without going through the formal appeal process; the vast majority of these appeals are resolved in the student's favour.

2021-22 appeal outcomes
(resolved cases only)



2020-21 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 2020-21:

Time taken to resolve cases	2021-22 (%)	2020-21 (%)
Resolved within two months	371 (48.2%)	130 (30.3%)
Resolved in over two months	120 (15.6%)	173 (40.1%)
Unresolved at time of report	278 (36.2%)	122 (28.3%)

- 2.19 It is notable that the number of cases resolved within two months, as outlined by the [Appeal Policy](#), is now closing on 50%, a major improvement on last year's figures. In terms of appeals that extend beyond the two-month deadline, when taken together the proportion of cases resolved is longer than two months and the proportion unresolved remains high (52%). Nevertheless, the number of unresolved cases in 2021-22 (to date) is less than the numerical increase in appeal numbers from 2020-21. Had 2021-22's appeals figures been the same as 2020-21's, all these appeals would have been resolved, to date. .
- 2.20 The long-standing issue of high case volume for the ACCO remains, across both appeals and academic misconduct. However, last year's report did express hope that all historic appeals cases would be cleared by the summer of 2022. The subsequent massive, unexpected spike in academic misconduct cases, which is the subject of a separate report, threatened this ambitious target. That said, 99% of all outstanding/historic appeal cases were successfully cleared by the summer of 2022. Hence, from the 2022-23 academic year onwards, the ACCO will be able to process a significant and ever-increasing majority of the appeals it receives within the stated two-month timeframe. These improvements in faster turnaround times have been achieved through a combination of factors detailed below.
- 2.21 It's been well noted in previous year's reports that a great many appeals received by the ACCO are without merit, but still required 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 Many formal appeals can and should have been resolved informally, through timely discussion and dialogue between the student and their school/institute. In such cases there should be no good 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. In 2021, EQSB 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, as recommended by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). The greater use of this highly desirable first stage in the appeals process by Queen Mary can only enhance the timeliness and efficiency with which it manages and concludes its cases.
- 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 implementation of an electronic casework management system will have further positive impacts on the appeal process.

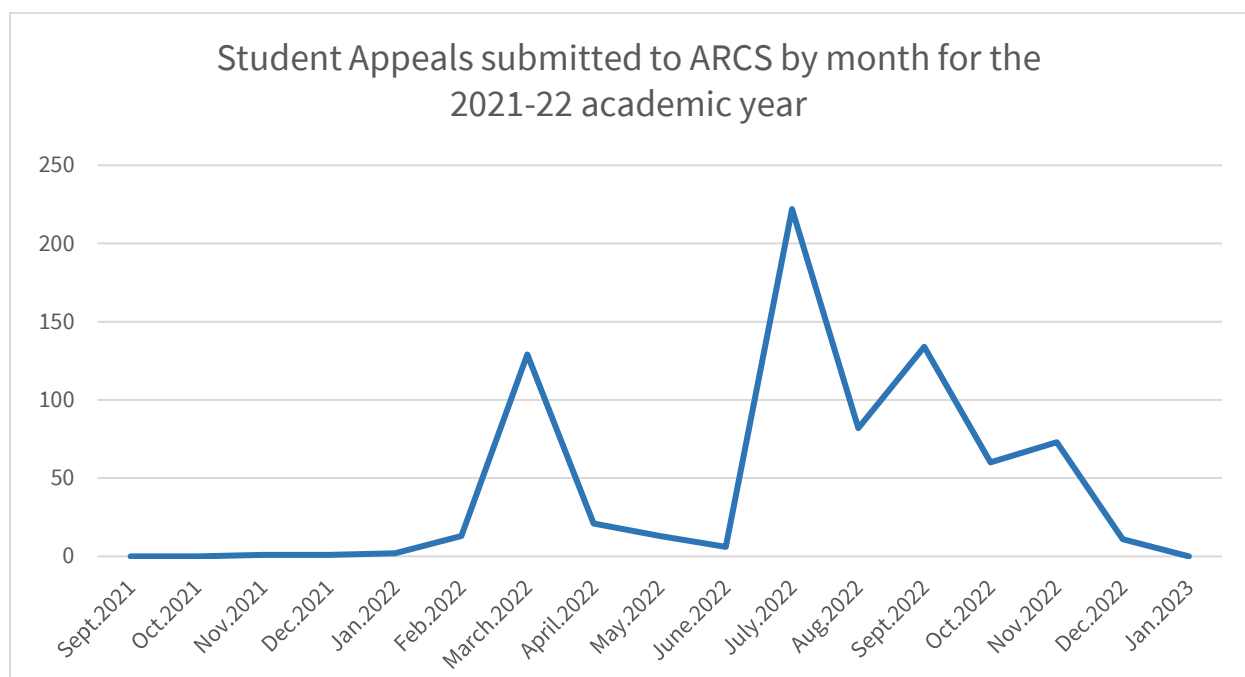
2.24 Staff resourcing in the ACCO improved significantly in late 2022 with the hiring of two new members of staff to join the present team of five fulltime staff members. This should result in further positive impacts across all types of casework. In conjunction with the incoming electronic casework management system, there is optimism within the ACCO that next year’s report will show that Queen Mary has been able to take significant strides towards achieving the timelines stipulated in the [Appeal Policy](#).

2.25 That said, and as already noted above, 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 2022-3 academic year and beyond.

2.26 The ACCO would again 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 nineteen active 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.

Seasonal peaks and troughs for appeals in 2021-22

2.27 Appeals are submitted unevenly across the academic and calendar year, but they tend to congregate at certain points, especially in the wake of examination boards meeting in early and late summer, as can be seen in the table below. The first spike shown below, in March 2022, relates to non-academic appeals submitted against C-3 deregistration notices. The highest spike, in late July 2022, relates to academic appeals submitted against decisions of late June/early July examination boards. The next spike, in September 2022, relates to academic appeals submitted against decisions of the late summer resit/September examination boards. The final spike, in November 2022, relates to appeals submitted by postgraduate students who have received their exam and final award results from the October 2022 PG examination boards, many after completing their Masters dissertations.



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

- 2.28 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.
- 2.29 There have been 34 requests (there were 33 in 2020-21) for Final Review to date from appeals submitted in the 2021-22 academic year, 3 of which have been resolved at the time of writing. This is partial data, however, as 278 cases remain unresolved, many of which could go to Final Review.
- 2.30 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 2021-22 academic year, the Queen Mary [Student Complaints Policy](#) had two formal stages (plus an informal resolution stage). The first stage (Formal Complaint) is normally handled at the school/institute/service level. The second stage (Complaint Review) are coordinated by the Appeals, Complaints, and Conduct Office (ACCO). Decisions at the Complaint Review stage are taken by a Complaints Assessor, appointed from among appropriate staff. If a student remains unsatisfied after a Complaint Review, they have recourse to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).
- 3.3 This report covers complaints dealt with by the ACCO only in the 2021-22 academic year; it is noted that a handful of complaints dealt with in 2021-22 were under an older version of the Policy. Further, it is noted that the incoming casework management system anticipated to be implemented in the very 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 It is noted that the emphasis on informal resolution remains in place. Queen Mary does receive a relatively small number of formalised 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 2021-22, the ACCO dealt with 19 complaints of various types. This is fewer than in 2020-21 (29), and more in keeping with the numbers in 2019-20 (21) and 2018-19 (23). None of the previous four academic years have reached the figure set in 2017-18 (33). It is noted that numbers of complaints tend to fluctuate.

The complaints considered in 2021-22 were split more or less evenly between complaints about academic matters (9) and those that were non-academic in nature (8); 2 complaints were about both academic and non-academic issues.

3.6 The non-academic issues addressed by complaints in 2021-22 included:

- Dissatisfaction with the support given to disabled students
- Issues to do with residences
- Industrial action and/or Covid-19 provision
- Dissatisfaction with the Queen Mary student disciplinary process
- Dissatisfaction with Queen Mary Human Resources processes
- Allegations of inappropriate behaviour against Queen Mary staff
- Dissatisfaction with the graduation process

3.7 The academic issues addressed by complaints in 2021-22 included:

- Disagreement with the application of various policies on academic progression
- Teaching provision during the pandemic and periods of industrial action
- Dissatisfaction with the academic guidance provided by Queen Mary academic members of staff, including postgraduate research supervision
- Dissatisfaction with academic findings regarding research authorship

Complaints: outcomes and timescales

3.8 At the time of writing, 11 complaints received in 2021-22 remain under investigation; 8 have been resolved. Of the completed complaints, 5 were not upheld but compensation was offered for the delays, 2 complaints resulted in disciplinary penalties being applied to another student, and 1 was rejected out of time.

3.9 The average time taken for the ACCO to resolve a complaint in 2021-22 was 186 calendar days. This is a significant increase from the year before, when the average time was 58 days, and is higher than each of the preceding four years as well: 2019-20 (98); 2018-19 (127); 2017-18 (122); and 2016-17 (72). This must be a focus for the ACCO moving forward. 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. Any progress, however, is currently being impeded by the overall casework numbers facing the ACCO.

3.10 The figures below indicate the time taken to resolve Stage 2 complaints in 2021-22:

Time taken to resolve complaint	2021-22 (2020-21)
Within 30 days	1 (9)
Between 30 and 90 days	0 (5)
More than 90 days	7 (7)
Ongoing	11 (8)

Complaints: equalities data and breakdowns

3.11 Full equalities data has not been included as numbers are small and could allow identification of individual cases. It is noted that 12 of the complaints considered by the ACCO in 2021-22 were from females; 7 were from males. White students were the ethnic group with the highest representation; 7 of the 19 complainants were white, whilst 13 of the 19 were classified as home students.

Disciplinary misconduct

3.12 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 appropriate nominee and a Vice-Principal, who then determine whether to proceed with the case. If the case does proceed, a Student Disciplinary Committee hears the matter 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.

3.13 Thirteen allegations of disciplinary misconduct were received by the ACCO in 2021-22, a significant drop from 19 in 2020-21, and closer to the 9 received in 2019-20. This figure is around half of the peak of 24 received in 2018-19, and is in line with the figures seen in 2017-18 (11) and 2016-17 (10). None of the 13 allegations received in 2021-22 remain under investigation.

3.14 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.

3.15 The 13 allegations received in 2021-22 featured the following behaviour:

- Drug possession on campus (1 of the 12 cases)
- Sexual misconduct and related offences (7)
- Inappropriate student behaviour towards a person external to Queen Mary (1)
- Inappropriate student behaviour towards other Queen Mary student/s, including bullying, harassment, and physical assault (4)

3.16 Of the 13 allegations investigated by the ACCO in 2021-22, it was decided that 3 allegations required a decision by a Student Disciplinary Committee. Of the remaining 10 allegations: 3 were not pursued because the responding student left Queen Mary and was therefore outside its jurisdiction; 3 were not pursued based on a lack of evidence; 2 allegations were withdrawn by the reporting student; and 2 allegations were resolved via informal means.

3.17 Where cases were considered by a Student Disciplinary Committee, the penalties awarded included formal instructions restricting activity, final written warnings, requirements to undertake training, restrictions from holding particular student offices, and suspensions.

3.18 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. The Code of Student Discipline was amended for the 2021-22 academic year to improve the process for handling

allegations of this kind. 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.

- 3.19 The biggest ongoing change to impact the disciplinary process has been the recruitment of a Sexual Assault and Harassment Advisor (SAHA). This member of staff is an expert who is able to deal with students alleging sexual misconduct and related offences in a trauma-informed way. Despite the significant risks to an individual institution, such as those presented by the OfS conditions of registration, the ACCO understands that no more than 15 such SAHAs have been appointed across the UKHE sector. This positive step forward will continue to reap benefits, primarily in the way Queen Mary is able to support its students who allege sexual misconduct and related offences, but also in more structural and process focused ways, such as: working in partnership with our Policy and Campaigns Manager to design and deliver training on responding to disclosures of sexual misconduct; designing and delivering awareness raising campaigns around Sexual Violence Week and 16 days of activism; setting up a support group for students who are survivors of sexual violence.

[Discipline: equalities data and breakdown](#)

- 3.20 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](#)

- 3.21 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 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.
- 3.22 There were no fitness to practise cases heard in the 2021-22 academic year. Queen Mary heard two cases in the 2020-21 academic year. There was one fitness to practise case heard in each of 2019-20 and 2018-19, whilst there were two heard in 2017-18.