



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

ACADEMIC APPEALS POLICY

1. Purpose and scope



- 1.1 This document provides a framework to assist students and staff with administering academic appeals. The Department of Graduate Studies (DGS) is committed to ensuring that any appeal is dealt with fairly and in accordance with this policy.

Appeals which would be more appropriately dealt with under a different policy or procedure (e.g. the Complaints Procedure or the Mitigating Circumstances Policy) will be transferred to that policy or procedure. In such cases, the IIS will inform the student.

- 1.2 This policy has been designed with reference to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's (OIA) guidance document [The good practice framework for handling complaints and academic appeals](#) (rev. December 2016). It is based on the OIA's core principles of accessibility, clarity, proportionality, timeliness, fairness, independence, confidentiality and improving the student experience, and aims to provide a framework to support students and staff in administering academic appeals. It also draws on good practice from the [SOAS University of London's Appeals Procedure](#) (May 2016).
- 1.3 This policy applies to all taught postgraduate provision directly administered by the Department of Graduate Studies (DGS). Agreements with external providers who administer part or all of a postgraduate programme belonging to but not directly administered by DGS may specify alternative arrangements for academic appeals; in such cases, the policy of the external provider shall supersede this policy.
- 1.4 This policy applies to all current students at the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) who want to appeal against an assessment, progression or withdrawal decision made by an academic body at the IIS, known as the 'academic decision-making body'.

A current student is anyone who:

- (a) Is enrolled on an IIS programme
- (b) Is on a temporary suspension or exclusion
- (c) Has recently left the IIS and is within the time limit for making an appeal.

For the purposes of this policy, an academic decision-making body is limited to the following:

- (a) The DGS Academic Management Committee (AMC)
- (b) The IIS Plagiarism Committee
- (c) A Programme Board (including the Exam Board).

The comprehensive appeals procedure consists of three phases, although some cases may only follow one or two of these:





- 1.5 The IIS aims to administer all appeals in a timely manner: the whole procedure (including the Review) should be completed within 90 calendar days following submission of an appeal. There may be occasions where, with good reason, the timeframe needs to be extended; in such cases, the IIS will inform the student.
- 1.6 Academic appeals are an internal process which aims to establish facts in light of evidence and on the balance of probabilities. It is not adversarial; therefore, legal representation is not required by any of the parties involved and will not be permitted.
- 1.7 **Accessibility:** If you need this document in a different format, please ask a member of staff. If a student has difficulty at any stage of the procedure because of a disability, they should discuss the situation with Student Services as soon as possible.

2 Supporting the student

- 2.1 The IIS will direct students to the support services available. This applies to students who are going through appeals procedures.
- 2.2 In line with our duties under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students, if a student says the academic concern is related to a disability, we will consider carefully whether to proceed with the appeal, or to refer the student to other support processes.
- 2.3 We aim for our procedures to be available to all students in accessible formats. If there are adjustments we could make to improve communication, the student should inform the Department. Where needed, in appeals procedures we will make adjustments to the process followed in individual cases. For example, we may make adjustments for Appeal Hearings, or allow a student longer to respond.
- 2.4 Students who have mental health difficulties will be informed about the specific support services available to them, for example counselling services, as soon as the Department is made aware of the need to do so. If a student appears unable to engage effectively with the appeals process, we may suggest that the student appoints a representative. It may be appropriate to suspend the appeals process until the student has accessed appropriate support.

3 Grounds for appeal

- 3.1 Students may appeal against the following decisions:
 - (a) Assessment results



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- (b) Progressing from one year to the next
- (c) Withdrawal of the scholarship due to not meeting progression requirements.

3.2 Students can submit an appeal on the following grounds:

Ground	Description	Evidence
Administrative or procedural irregularity or error	Evidence exists which shows there was an administrative or procedural irregularity or error in the conduct of assessment.	The student must clearly demonstrate what they consider the irregularity or error to be, how and when it occurred, and how it may have affected or did affect the assessment.
Mitigating circumstances	Presenting new evidence of mitigating circumstances which, for good reason, the decision-making body was not made aware of at the time of making their decision.	The student must explain what the circumstances were and what their impact was, and provide a valid and overriding reason why this evidence was not made available to the decision-making body when the circumstances occurred. For guidance on acceptable evidence, see the Mitigating Circumstances Policy.
Prejudice or bias (actual or perceived) which can be proved	Evidence exists which shows there was prejudice or bias, or the perception of prejudice or bias, on behalf of a marker and/or the decision-making body such that the result of the assessment, progression or withdrawal decision should not stand.	The student must clearly and fully explain the reasons for the claim of prejudice or bias, or perception thereof. This may include comments from a third party concerning comments or remarks made by others.



The following are **not** grounds for appeal and will be rejected:

Academic judgment	Programme management	Vexatious appeal
<p>Students cannot appeal against a mark because they are dissatisfied with it. It has to be demonstrated that there are grounds for the appeal (see ‘Grounds for appeal’ above).</p> <p>If a student believes that there has been an error in calculating or recording marks, they can request a clerical check of marks via the Academic Administrator by emailing AcadAdmin@iis.ac.uk</p>	<p>Problems that arise during the course of a student’s studies, including problems with conveying information or teaching, should be dealt with at the time they occur. Students may use the Complaints Policy if the problem is not rectified.</p>	<p>These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appeals which are obsessive, harassing, or repetitive• Insistence on pursuing non-meritorious appeals and/or unrealistic, unreasonable outcomes• Insistence on pursuing what may be meritorious appeals in an unreasonable manner• Appeals which are designed to cause disruption or annoyance• Demands for redress which lack any serious purpose or value.

4 Procedure for making an appeal

- 4.1 Students wishing to appeal must make their case on the Appeals Form, outlining their grounds for appeal and providing sufficient documentary evidence to support that. The appeal must be submitted to the Senior Education Programmes Officer (SEPO: SEPO@iis.ac.uk).
- 4.2 The student must submit their appeal within twenty (20) calendar days of the formal notification of the assessment, progression or withdrawal decision. Appeals received after this must include a statement explaining why. Late appeals will only be considered if the reason is found acceptable by DGS’ Special Projects Manager. If not, the student will receive a written explanation of why their appeal has been rejected, and they can request a Review of that decision (see below, ‘Review phase’).
- 4.3 Appeals must be made by the student and not by a third party unless there are mitigating circumstances which prevent the student from making the appeal themselves. The IIS will not correspond with third parties unless the student has given written permission for this. In such cases, the IIS will communicate with either the student or the third party, but not both.



- 4.4 **Appeals submitted incorrectly will be rejected.** Appeals must be submitted on the Appeals Form and clearly state the grounds for the appeal and summarise the issues and preferred outcome. Sufficient documentary evidence must be provided if appropriate. The appeal must also be accompanied by a copy of the official correspondence confirming the decision that the student is appealing against.

5 Phase 1: Investigation

- 5.1 After receiving the appeal, the SEPO will undertake an initial evaluation to check it:
- (a) Has been submitted on time using the Appeals Form
 - (b) Falls within the grounds for an appeal
 - (c) If appropriate, contains sufficient and adequate documentary evidence
 - (d) If appropriate, includes evidence for late submission of the appeal.
- 5.2 **If the appeal does not meet the initial evaluation criteria stated above**, the student will be informed within five (5) working days, outlining the reasons for this. The student will be permitted to resubmit the appeal within five (5) working days if they can provide clear grounds for the appeal, further documentary evidence, or a valid and overriding reason why the appeal was not submitted on time. The start of the procedure will begin from when the whole appeal including evidence has been received. The SEPO will undertake a further evaluation check based on the criteria above. If the appeal still does not meet these criteria, the appeal will be rejected and the student will be informed, with reasons, within five (5) working days. The student has the right to request a Review of this decision (see below, 'Review stage').
- 5.3 **Where the initial evaluation demonstrates that there is overwhelming evidence in support of the appeal or that a procedural error has occurred**, the SEPO can refer the matter direct to the decision-making body with a recommended course of immediate rectifying action. If the relevant decision-making body disagrees with that course of action, the appeal should be referred to an Investigating Officer (see below).
- 5.3.1 If the appeal meets the initial evaluation criteria and immediate rectifying action has not been taken, the appeal will be passed to an Investigating Officer. The Investigating Officer will normally be a senior member of academic staff who is outside the AMC and does not have any previous involvement in the matter.
 - 5.3.2 The Investigating Officer will review the paperwork and may need to contact the decision-making body or other key staff involved in the matter for written feedback if necessary, via the SEPO (SEPO@iis.ac.uk).
 - 5.3.3 The SEPO will ask the Investigating Officer to respond within an appropriate timeframe so that the SEPO can inform the student of the outcome within twenty (20) calendar



days (or sooner if the appeal requires swift action, i.e. where the student has severe health issues or there are external deadlines).

5.4 The Investigating Officer will make one of the following decisions and report this to the SEPO:

- (a) **Reject the appeal due to insufficient grounds.** The reasons will be communicated to the student by the SEPO and they will be advised of their right to request a Review of the decision (see below, ‘Review stage’).
- (b) **Make a recommendation on the appeal for the decision-making body to consider.** The decision-making body can:

Recommendation	Uphold the appeal	Partially uphold the appeal (possibly offering a revised outcome)	Reject the appeal
Outcome	The IIS will consider the matter closed.	The student may request an Appeal Hearing if they are unhappy with the outcome.	

- (c) **Refer the appeal to an Appeal Panel.** This will happen where the case is complex and/or contains contradictory evidence.

5.5 The SEPO will communicate the decision to the student along with information about what next steps they can take.

6 Phase 2: Appeals Hearing

6.1 The purpose of the Appeals Hearing is to assess whether the student has valid grounds for their appeal. It will be conducted by an Appeals Panel, who will not re-examine any part of the student’s work as part of this phase of the procedure.

6.2 The Appeals Panel will consist of three members of IIS academic and senior staff:

- (a) Chair: The Co-Director (if unconnected with the case) or nominee
- (b) A member of academic staff not from DGS who is unconnected with the case
- (c) A member of staff from the senior management team who is not from DGS and is unconnected with the case.

An administrator from outside DGS will act as Secretary to the Panel, making all necessary arrangements for the Panel and taking notes at the Appeals Hearing.



- 6.3 The student may be accompanied to the Appeals Hearing by a companion who can be a friend, fellow student or family member. The companion is there to provide support but may not address the Panel: the student is expected to present their case and answer the Panel's questions by themselves. The name and details of the companion must be sent to the Secretary at least five (5) working days before the Hearing.
- 6.4 If there are dates on which it is impossible for a student to attend a Hearing, they should inform the Secretary as soon as possible. Every attempt will be made to find a date which is convenient to all those involved; if the student is unable to attend the Hearing in person, it may be possible to conduct it via Skype during the IIS' normal working hours. If neither option is possible, then the Hearing will be conducted in the student's absence. The student may be able to nominate a representative, depending on the circumstances.
- 6.5 The Appeals Panel will request the attendance of a maximum of two representatives from the decision-making body to respond to the appeal.
- 6.6 Once the date and time of the Hearing have been agreed, formal notification will be sent to the student by the Secretary at least ten (10) working days beforehand and will include the names and roles of the Panel members and the decision-making body's representative(s). The student will be asked to confirm their attendance at the Hearing and they should inform the Secretary at the earliest opportunity if they believe there is a conflict of interest with any of the Panel members. If such a conflict of interest exists, an alternative Panel member will be found. This may require the Hearing to be postponed.
- 6.7 The student and the decision-making body's representative(s) have the right to call other people to attend the Hearing to present evidence only if they have obtained advance approval from the Chair of the Panel.
- 6.8 All of those involved in the Hearing (i.e. the Panel, the student and the decision-making body's representative(s)) will receive the same documentation, namely:
- (a) The written submission from the student
 - (b) The written submission of the decision-making body's representative(s)
 - (c) Any other documentation the Panel considers relevant to the appeal.
- 6.9 After receiving the documentation, the student and the decision-making body's representative(s) may provide further written evidence in response to the documentation but this must be received by the Panel secretary within five (5) working days before the Hearing. The additional paperwork will be sent electronically to all those attending the Hearing.
- 6.10 If any member of the Panel is absent on the day of the Hearing due to unforeseen circumstances, the student will be asked if they wish to proceed with the Hearing or if they would like to



postpone it. The absence of the student and/or the decision-making body representative(s) at the Hearing will not invalidate the proceedings, and the appeal will be heard in their absence.

- 6.11 If both the student and the decision-making body's representative(s) are present, the Hearing will be conducted in the presence of both parties (and if appropriate the student's companion) until the Panel retires to consider its findings.
- 6.12 The Hearing will last a maximum of two hours and follow the procedure below. Before the Hearing, the Panel will meet to agree the questions they would like to put to the student and the decision-making body's representative(s).
- 6.13 The Chair may vary the procedure in any case where they consider it would be appropriate and fair. Any variation will be recorded in the notes of the Hearing and must be in accordance with this policy. In exceptional circumstances, the Chair may adjourn the Hearing until a future date or time.
- The Chair explains the purpose of the Hearing and all persons present introduce themselves.
 - The student summarises the grounds for their appeal.
 - The decision-making body representative(s) summarise their position on the appeal.
 - The Panel puts questions to the student and the decision-making body's representative(s) as appropriate. The Chair may permit either the student or the decision-making body's representative(s) to put questions to each other at any stage of the hearing; however, all questions must go through the Chair.
 - If the student or decision-making body's representative(s) have asked to call other people to present evidence, the Chair will decide when and if it is appropriate to call them into the Hearing. They will only be permitted to attend the Hearing when asked to give evidence and may not stay for the entire proceedings.
 - The student may make any concluding remarks.
 - The Chair concludes the procedure so the Panel can retire to make its decision.
- 6.14 The Appeals Panel can decide to (a) **uphold** the appeal, (b) **partially uphold** it, or (c) **reject** it.
- 6.15 The outcome of the Hearing must be communicated to the student and the decision-making body representative(s) in writing by the Secretary within five (5) working days. Clear and concise reasons for each decision must be provided along with a copy of the notes from the Hearing. The student and/or the decision-making body's representative(s) may inform the Secretary of any errors/omissions in the notes and an amended copy of the notes will be provided if the amendments are approved by the Chair.
- 6.16 In the case of outcomes (b) and (c), the Secretary will advise the student of their right to make a complaint to the OIA (see below) and the time limit for submitting the complaint.



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- 6.17 The IIS will also inform the student by a Completion of Procedures Letter that the internal procedure has been completed.
- 6.18 The decision of the Appeals Panel is final.

7 Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)

- 7.1 The OIA provides an independent scheme for the review of student grievances under the Higher Education Act 2004. Further information can be found on their website (<http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>).
- 7.2 At the end of the IIS' appeals procedure, the student has the right to submit a request for the IIS' decision to be reviewed by the OIA.
- 7.3 The OIA Complaint Form must be received by the OIA within twelve (12) months of the date of the Completion of Procedures Letter.



8 Document control

Document to be reviewed annually and updated (as necessary) for the new academic year.

Version	Role / Activity	Person(s) responsible	Date
Version 1	Document Owner and Author	GPISH and STEP Programme Leaders	June 2018
	Reviewer	Student Services Manager	July 2018
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	Approval	AMC	November 2018
	Evaluation and review	GPISH and STEP Programme Leaders	July 2021
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Version 2	Approval	AMC	September 2021
	Evaluation and review	GPISH and STEP Programme Leaders	July 2024
	Amendments as necessary	GPISH and STEP Programme Leaders	August 2024



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Completion of Procedures Letter Template

Dear *[Name of complainant]*,

Completion of Procedures Letter

This letter confirms that the internal procedures of the Institute of Ismaili Studies in relation to your *complaint / appeal etc** regarding *[please describe]* have been completed.

The issues that you raised in your *complaint / appeal etc** were *[details]*

The issue(s) that were considered in relation to your *complaint / appeal etc* was / were*: *[brief summary of the complaint etc]*.

The final decision of the Institute of Ismaili Studies is* *[detail]* because *[reasons]*.

The procedures / regulations applied were*: *[details and date as supplied to the OIA's electronic Regulations Bank]*.

The Institute of Ismaili Studies subscribes to the independent scheme for the review of student complaints. If you are dissatisfied with the outcome you may be able to apply for a review of *your complaint / appeal etc** to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) provided that the complaint you take to the OIA is eligible under its Rules.

Should you decide to make a complaint to the OIA, your OIA Complaint Form **must be received by the OIA** within **12 months** of the date of this letter, that is, it must be received by the OIA **on or before** *[insert date - e.g. if the Completion of Procedures Letter is dated 9 July 2015, this date should be 9 July 2016]*.

[Include here any factors of which the provider is aware which mean that it is particularly important for the student to bring the complaint promptly.]

You can fill in the OIA's complaint form online or download a copy from the OIA website. <http://oiahe.org.uk/making-a-complaint-to-the-oia/oia-complaint-form.aspx>. The OIA also publishes *An Introduction to the OIA Scheme for Students*, which can be downloaded from <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/media/122228/intrototheoia-students-april2018.pdf>. Alternatively, you can telephone or write to the OIA for a form. **You should send a copy of this letter to the OIA with your OIA Complaint Form.**

Guidance on submitting a complaint to the OIA and the OIA Complaint Form can also be found on the OIA's website <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/making-a-complaint-to-the-oia/how-to-make-a-complaint.aspx>. You may also wish to seek advice from the Students' Union about taking your complaint to the OIA.

Please note that the OIA will normally only review issues that have been dealt with through the provider's internal procedures.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Laila Halani

Head, Department of Graduate Studies