



UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA

ACADEMIC APPEALS - GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. Aim

These guidelines are intended to explain the process for resolution of academic appeals and complaints. Before making a formal appeal or complaint, students are encouraged to talk to their lecturers or to seek advice from the Head of Department where they are registered. Advice on the appeals and complaints process can also be obtained from the Customer Service Centre.

The University's procedure on appeals and complaints is founded on the assumption that University staff will at all times deal thoughtfully and sympathetically with students' problems, so as to minimise the occurrence of academic appeals and complaints. Students are encouraged to seek advice from their schools and raise matters informally. Where an appeal or complaint is not resolved informally, the formal procedure provided in these guidelines provides for resolution of the matter.

1.1.1. Academic Appeals

An **appeal** is a request for the *reconsideration of a decision* made on the academic progress of a student. The procedure for raising an academic appeal allows a student to request for a review of a decision relating to their academic progress or award.

1.1.2. Academic Complaints

A **Complaint** is an expression of *dissatisfaction relating to the actions, lack of action or behaviour* of one or more members of staff responsible for any part of the academic processes. This could involve concerns around a procedural error, irregularity, prejudice or bias.

If a student has a complaint about teaching, supervision or circumstances which relate to the delivery of their programme of study before being examined, these should be raised as a complaint with the department at the earliest opportunity and, if necessary, a formal complaint submitted to the Dean of the School.

1.2. Scope

These guidelines are intended to deal with student academic appeals and complaints and apply to all students. Parties to a dispute include students, course lecturers and coordinators, and supervisors. These guidelines do not override the provisions in other Regulations and must be interpreted so as to be consistent with other University Regulations and Statutes. These provisions are applicable to regular and distance students of the University.

Decisions about academic progress of students are made by the University Senate on recommendations from the Boards of Examiners of academic units. However, students may consider, perhaps reasonably, that some particular decisions made by the Senate or its subordinate committees are defective. Students may therefore wish to appeal against such decisions. Circumstances in which students may submit an appeal include the following:

- (a) change of comment;
- (b) change of grade; and
- (c) missing results.

1.3. Resolution of Student Academic Appeals

1.3.1. Grounds for Raising an Academic Appeal

Although appeals are distinguished from complaints, the resolution procedures for both are the same. Therefore, the word *appeal* is used to also imply a complaint in these guidelines.

Appeals which simply challenge the academic judgement of internal or external examiners or Boards of Examiners are not permitted. A student may not raise an academic-related appeal if the student feels the results are not as good as they had expected. The valid grounds for appeal are summarised below:

- (a) there are circumstances which materially affected the student's performance, for which supporting evidence exists, which were not known to the Board of Examiners or Senate at the time its decision was taken and which it was not reasonably practicable for the student to make known beforehand;
- (b) there were procedural irregularities in the conduct of the examination or assessment of such a nature as to create a reasonable possibility that the result may have been different if it had not occurred; and
- (c) there is evidence of prejudice or bias or lack of proper assessment on the part of the examiners.

It is important that students notify their departments of any matters which may be relevant to their academic performance (e.g. personal or medical circumstances at the time they occur and to supply supporting documentary evidence, such as medical certificates, etc). Unless there were very good reasons why a student was unable to notify the department or supply evidence at the time, the appeal should be disallowed.

Students should also note that the University operates a system of cross-checking, which includes moderation and the use of external examiners' input to ensure that there are adequate checks on the accuracy and appropriateness of examination papers and marking of scripts to help prevent prejudice and bias.

1.3.2. Submission of an Academic Complaint

If a student decides that he or she has eligible grounds for appeal, the student should:

- (a) appeal on his/her own behalf and take the responsibility to obtain the required evidence;
- (b) note that the University will not contact third parties (e.g. doctors, social welfare personnel, etc.) on behalf of the student;
- (c) complete and submit the *Form for Lodging an Academic Appeal* with supporting documentary evidence; and

- (d) ensure that the appeal is submitted by the stated deadline as a failure to do so will result in the appeal being disallowed. The deadline will be communicated on a year-by-year basis, but it is, in general ***14 days after publication of results***.

It is important that the student submits evidence to support the appeal. This must be new evidence, i.e. not just copies of evidence already submitted and considered by Boards of Examiners. Where medical evidence is submitted this must be from the University of Zambia Medical Officer. Medical certificates obtained from other medical practitioners must be verified by the University of Zambia Medical Officer.

On receipt of the appeal the Quality Assurance Directorate will check whether the appeal is presented in the right format with sufficient supporting documents. If not, the student will be notified in writing and advised that the appeal cannot be accepted or the student will be offered the opportunity to supply more information or evidence within a stated timeframe.

All appeals will be acknowledged. Once an appeal has been received a report will be requested from the student's department and this along with the appeal will form the documents to be submitted to the ***Academic Appeals Resolution Panel*** appointed by the Dean of the School on behalf of the University Senate.

The appellant will be sent a copy of the departmental report and be offered the opportunity to submit written comments on it by a specified deadline. The appellant will be notified in advance of the date the appeal will be considered and will be given an opportunity to be heard.

1.3.3. Unacceptable Behaviour in Resolution of Academic Complaints

The University reserves the right not to continue with the appeals resolution process if the appeal is conducted in a way which is abusive, offensive, defamatory, aggressive or intimidating, or pursued in an unreasonably persistent or vexatious manner. If there is good cause to consider that this is the case at any stage of the process, the matter shall be reported to the ***Student Disciplinary Committee*** for consideration and the procedure for resolution of the complaint shall be suspended pending the outcome of the student disciplinary process. If the Student Disciplinary Regulations are found to have been breached in the context of a appeal, the Quality Assurance Directorate may decide to close the matter and inform the appellant accordingly.

1.3.4. Appeal to the Vice-Chancellor

In exceptional cases, where a student believes that the resolution process has been conducted incorrectly or that the outcome is unreasonable in relation to the evidence, the student has the right to raise the matter for independent review by the Vice-Chancellor. The Vice-Chancellor will use his/her discretion in constituting an advisory team, if need be, and his/her decision will be final. The appellant must show evidence that there are flaws in the resolution process conducted by the Appeals Resolution Panel.

1.4. Procedure for Resolution of an Academic Appeal

1.4.1. Stage 1: Lodging an Academic Complaint

- (a) Download the *Form for Lodging an Academic Appeal* from “<https://www.unza.zm>” and complete it electronically.
- (b) Submit the form together with scanned copies of all supporting documents in PDF by email to “director.qa@unza.zm”. This ensures that your details cannot be altered. No paper submissions will be accepted.

1.4.2. Stage 2: Checking the Documents and Dispatch to School

- (a) On receipt of the appeal the Quality Assurance Directorate will check whether the appeal is presented in the right format with sufficient supporting documents. If not, the student will be notified in writing and advised that the complaint cannot be accepted or the student will be offered the opportunity to supply more information or evidence within a stated timeframe.
- (b) The Director, Quality Assurance shall write to the Dean of the appropriate school regarding the appeal. The Dean shall acknowledge in writing the receipt of the appeal within 2 week days.

1.4.3. Stage 3: Departmental Consultation Process

- (a) The Dean of the School will officially request the Head of the department in which the appeal is registered to investigate the matter and produce a report within 5 week days.
- (b) The Head of Department shall nominate a senior member of staff who has had no prior involvement in the matter under consideration to investigate the appeal. If the Head of Department is the subject of investigations, he or she will delegate the functions related to the appeal to any senior member of staff in the department.
- (c) The investigating officer is empowered to undertake all investigations and interviews required to investigate the appeal and to report the findings to the Head of Department. The outcome of the investigations shall form the report to be submitted to the Dean.
- (d) The appellant may be called for an interview during the period of investigation. The appellant may be accompanied to the interview by *one representative* or friend. Where it is not practicable for the appellant to be called for interview (for example where the appellant is abroad), the investigating officer may, in consultation with the appellant, refer any questions arising from their investigations to the appellant in writing, including by email.
- (e) So far as is practicable, the Head of Department, will respond to the appeal in full within 5 week days of receipt of the appeal from the Dean, setting out in writing his or her findings and recommendations in relation to the matter and the reasons for the recommendations. If the Head of Department is unable to provide a decision within 5 working days, he or she shall write to the Dean setting out the reasons for the delay and the anticipated date for the issuing of recommendations.
- (f) It is expected that the majority of appeals will be resolved by the Departments and the report sent to the Dean should be sufficient to close the matter.

1.4.4. Stage 4: Academic Appeals Resolution Panel Meetings

- (a) In case the Dean considers that the matter has not been concluded by the department, the Dean shall within 2 days of receipt of the report of the outcome of departmental consultations, appoint an *Academic Appeals Resolution Panel* to consider the appeal further provide recommendations.
- (b) The *Academic Appeals Resolution Panel* meetings will be convened to give the matter due consideration. The panel will invite the Head of Department to its first meeting to

give a verbal report of the outcome of departmental consultations. The panel will give the Head an opportunity to answer any questions that arise during the meeting.

- (c) If it is determined that there is a prima facie case for further consideration of the appeal, the panel may institute further investigations of its own and may call any witnesses its deems fit to a hearing.
- (d) When the panel is satisfied with all evidence presented to it in relations to the appeal, it shall deliberate and issue a letter addressed to the Dean regarding the outcome of the deliberations which shall constitute a completion of procedures.

1.4.5. Stage 5: Notification to Student

- (e) The Dean shall send to the Director, Quality Assurance a formal notification of the outcome of the resolution process. The notification will be in form of a letter explaining the outcome and the reasons for it.
- (f) The Director, Quality Assurance shall notify the student by email of the formal outcome of the resolution process. The notification will contain an explanation of the outcome and the reasons for it.

1.5. Flowchart for Resolution of Students Academic Complaints

