

**Royal Northern College of Music**

# **Academic Appeals**

**Policy & Procedure**

**Department: Academic**

**Document owner: Head of Academic  
Quality and Standards**

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**RNCM**  
ROYAL NORTHERN  
COLLEGE of MUSIC

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## **STUDENT ACADEMIC APPEALS PROCEDURE**

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*All Students – Collaborative Programmes and RNCM Taught*

### **Introduction**

An Academic Appeal is a request to review a decision of the RNCM Board of Examiners in relation to assessment. Such decisions may affect a student's progress, award, or classification of their degree or qualification.

In reaching a final decision on a student's assessment, the Board of Examiners may take into account other factors brought to its attention, including illness or unexpected circumstances; **it is, therefore, in the interests of students to ensure that they follow the College's Extenuating Circumstances procedures and it is incumbent upon them to do so at the time of the assessment(s) affected, or shortly afterwards.**

If a student is unable to comply with the timetable outlined in the Extenuating Circumstances procedure, any evidence of exceptional factors affecting performance in assessments, which is submitted after the Board of Examiners' meeting at which the student's results are determined, will be considered only if the student can demonstrate a valid reason to explain why they were unable to submit the evidence at the correct time.

The interests of students who submit an appeal will be safeguarded, both throughout the appeals process and the remaining time of their programme.

*NOTE:* An appeal differs from a complaint regarding the delivery of any of the College's services which should be considered under the separate Student Complaints Procedure. A complaint is defined as a formal expression of dissatisfaction about the provision of the programme, including teaching and supervision or an academic or non-academic College service or facility.

### **Using this Procedure**

This procedure is relevant for all students registered for an award conferred by the College; including students at partner organisations, who wish to review a decision of the Board of Examiners. Students who are no longer registered, for example, those whose programme has been terminated or those who have recently graduated, may submit an appeal within the prescribed timescale.

It is recognised that there may be circumstances where a collective submission may be made by a group of students, where the same circumstances are claimed to have existed and affected more than one student. Where a number of students wish to challenge decisions on the same basis, they may issue an appeal collectively provided that one student identifies themselves as the main contact person for the purposes of communication.

Where the College receives a number of appeals relating to the same issue, such as natural disasters (e.g. volcano ash preventing flights) or pandemic outbreaks etc., it may consider applications as a group.

Where a student indicates at any stage of the process that they have a disability, information will be made available to them in appropriate formats and reasonable adjustments made to the proceedings to accommodate their needs.

Where legal proceedings are under way, the College may delay the progression of the appeal until the outcome of such proceedings is known. In most cases, legal proceedings may not commence until the procedures of the institution and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator are completed.

## **Grounds for an Academic Appeal**

An application for a review of a decision of the Board of Examiners may be made only on grounds alleging:

- a) that there exists, or existed, extenuating circumstances affecting the student's performance of which the Examiners would not have been aware when their decision was taken and there is reasonable or good cause for that omission
- b) that there were procedural irregularities in the examination process
- c) that there is evidence of prejudice or bias on the part of one or more of the Examiners.

Appeals on the grounds of inadequate teaching, supervisory or other arrangements during the period of study should be raised at the time they occur and addressed through the College's Student Complaints procedure.

An appeal which questions the academic or professional judgement of those charged with the responsibility for assessing a student's academic performance or professional competence shall not be permitted. A student may not therefore question a mark or degree classification just because they feel they could have done better or are disappointed / surprised by the result.

*Note:* there is no provision for a request for an appeal by a third party.

## **Stages of the Academic Appeals Procedure**

### **Informal Resolution**

Prior to taking a final decision as to whether or not to request an appeal, students are advised to discuss any concerns about their results or Board of Examiners' decisions informally with their Head of School, or the Director of Programmes to attempt to resolve the issue. In cases where a simple error has been made this may normally be resolved by Chair's action on behalf of the Board of Examiners without the need to invoke the formal Academic Appeals procedure.

### **Timescale for submission of an Academic Appeal**

An appeal must be submitted, with evidence, as soon as possible and normally not later than 10 calendar days after the publication of the student's examination results. Delays in obtaining evidence should not prevent a request for appeal within the deadline and should be discussed with the Head of Academic Quality and Standards.

### **Stage 1 – Initial Review of Appeal**

If the student decides to make a formal request for an appeal, the student may seek advice from the Deputy Academic Registrar prior to submitting an application for review.

An application for review shall be submitted by the student in writing to the Head of Academic Quality and Standards. The student shall:

- Specify the ground(s) upon which the appeal is made; If a request for an appeal is advanced citing grounds under (a) above, the student shall state the reason for not making the evidence known in time for the Board of Examiners' meeting.
- Provide full particulars of their case.
- Provide supporting evidence. An appeal submitted without appropriate evidence will not normally be progressed.

***A late application for an appeal shall only be accepted if the Head of Academic Quality and Standards is satisfied that exceptional circumstances exist which made it reasonable for the applicant not to have applied within the period specified above.***

On receipt, the Head of Academic Quality and Standards will review the appeal and shall decide whether *prima facie* grounds for an appeal are established, but without exercising judgement on academic grounds to its validity. In doing so they shall undertake such enquiries as may seem appropriate to reach a decision.

In certain circumstances it may be deemed more appropriate to consider the application under other College policies, for example:

### **Student Complaints Process**

Complaints regarding the delivery of any of the College's services which should be considered under the separate Student Complaints Procedure.

### **Extenuating Circumstances Panel**

Where an appeal with *prima facie* grounds is submitted on the grounds of extenuating circumstances, it will be referred to the expertise of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel. (All rejected claims will be reviewed by the Academic Appeals Panel.)

Submissions will be rejected that are:

- i) clearly out of time with no valid reason
- ii) do not meet one or more of the specified grounds for appeal (including those based on academic and/ or professional judgement)
- iii) those which form the basis of a student complaint.

The Chair of the Academic Appeals Panel will make such a decision based on the evidence presented. In such instances the Head of Academic Quality and Standards will forward the application to the relevant staff member.

If the appeal is rejected at this stage, the student will be advised within 10 working days of submission, with reasons given, and informed if the matter should be dealt with under the College Complaints Procedure.

If the Head of Academic Quality and Standards is satisfied that grounds for appeal may have been established, students whose registration status is terminated or graduated will be reinstated until the appeal is resolved.

### **Stage 2 - Meeting of the Academic Appeals Panel**

If, following the review by the Head of Academic Quality and Standards, it appears there is sufficient evidence for the appeal to proceed, the Academic Appeals Panel shall normally be convened.

In cases where a simple error has been made, and, it is in the interests of the Student, the Chair may recommend that the appeal be accepted, consulting panel members by report, e.g. by e-mail. Any such consultation shall include all the documentation supplied by the student and any additional documentation and / or evidence located as part of the review. If all panel members agree to uphold the appeal, the standard procedure shall be followed in relation to notification of the outcome. The panel secretary shall record the details of any appeals considered in this manner. If panel members are not in agreement to uphold the appeal it shall be referred to the scheduled meeting at which it would have been considered.

The Academic Appeals Panel shall make its decision by a simple majority of its members. If there is not a majority in favour of, or against, the decision the Chair shall have a casting vote.

Meetings of the Academic Appeals Panel are scheduled three times a year following the Boards of Examiners and the dates may be found in the Calendar of Meetings.

A student who is invited to attend an Academic Appeals Panel has the right to appear in person and will normally be provided with five working days' notice of the hearing (unless the student waives this right). The proceedings of the Academic Appeals Panel shall not be invalidated by the absence of the student. If the student is at a distance and a face-to-face meeting is not possible, alternative arrangements shall be made, which may include a virtual meeting.

The student has the right to be accompanied by a fellow student or member of staff, provided that the person in question is not a member of staff referred to in the appeal and is not a member of the Board of Examiners. Normally, the person accompanying the student will only be allowed to speak at the student's request.

The Head of Academic Quality and Standards will provide the Chair of the panel with any comments and documentation relevant to the appeal. This information and documentation will be disclosed to the student and members of the panel in advance of the meeting.

The meeting will follow the format below:

- The student will be asked to explain their appeal and present their supporting evidence,
- Members of the panel will consider the evidence and seek clarification on key points.

The Academic Appeals Panel shall have the power to accept or reject the appeal. Decisions shall be relayed to the Board of Examiners which shall determine referrals and deferrals, having regard to the recommendations made by the Academic Appeals Panel and confirm the results for each student in relation to their progression or continuation.

Notice in writing of the outcome of the Academic Appeals Panel shall be sent by the Secretary to the student normally within five working days of the Appeals Panel meeting. This shall include reasons for reaching the decision, and where an appeal is upheld, the Board of Examiner's decision on the assessment.

The Academic Appeals Panel shall have the power to refer a significantly complex and severe appeal to the Fitness to Study Panel, in accordance with the Procedure on Fitness to Study.

The College shall not normally reimburse expenses incurred by students in the event of an appeal being upheld.

## **Membership and Terms of Reference** **ACADEMIC APPEALS PANEL**

### **Membership:**

<b>Director of Research (Chair)</b>	<b>DR</b>
<b>Head of Music Education</b> <i>or other senior member of academic staff</i>	<b>HME</b>
<b>Programme Leader from outside the student's programme</b> <i>(or other academic staff member from outside of the student's School of Study)</i>	<b>PL (Prog)</b>
<b>External Examiner, by report:</b>	<b>EE (Programme)</b>

The Academic Appeals Panel shall invite the relevant External Examiner to submit a written opinion on the application and shall take any such opinion into account. The Appeals Panel shall

report its decision to the External Examiner, but the External Examiner, will have no veto over the Panel's decision. External Examiners may request to attend Academic Appeals Panels as part of their examining role.

**Secretary:**  
**Head of Academic Quality and Standards**

**HAQS**

### **Terms of Reference**

The Academic Appeals Panel is responsible for considering and agreeing outcomes of appeals from students against decisions made by the Board of Examiners, and conveying decisions to the Board of Examiners who will then determine the consequence(s) the outcome has for the assessment decision(s) that has/have been appealed.

1. To consider and determine whether or not the academic appeal against a decision of the Board of Examiners is upheld or not upheld under the regulations governing academic appeals approved by Academic Board.
2. Where an appeal is submitted on the grounds of extenuating circumstances, to refer the case to the expertise of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel. All rejected claims will be reviewed by the Panel.
3. To recommend to the Board of Examiners, where an appeal is upheld, an appropriate course of action for the case.
4. To monitor and review both the operation and outcomes of the academic appeals process, making recommendations to the relevant body.
5. To report cases and their outcomes to the Board of Examiners and provide an annual report to the Education and Quality Committee.

### **Quorum:**

The Chair and all members of the Appeals Panel must be present for meetings to be quorate.

### **Reporting lines:**

The Appeals Panel reports its decisions to the Board of Examiners.

### **Monitoring of Requests for Review**

Reports on appeals submitted and their outcomes will be prepared annually and submitted to EQC.

### **Further Consideration of an Appeal**

There shall be no further appeal within the College in respect of the decision of the Academic Appeals Panel.

Students who believe that their case has not been dealt with properly by the College, or that the outcome is unreasonable, may be able to complain to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator of Higher Education (OIA), which exists to handle individual student complaints against higher education institutions.

Students must complete the internal College procedures before applying to the OIA.

Once the College's internal procedures have been exhausted, the College will issue the student with a 'Completion of Procedures' letter. If the student is still not satisfied and wishes to pursue the complaint further they should complete the OIA's Scheme Application form (available from the OIA's website [www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk)).

Students are advised that applications to the OIA are best made within three months of the date of the 'Completion of Procedures' letter and must be submitted **within twelve months** at the latest.

The OIA *will* consider complaints connected with welfare issues, contractual issues, breach of College procedures, discrimination or poor practice.

The OIA *will not* consider complaints connected with academic judgement, matters which are the subject of court or tribunal proceedings or employment matters.

The College will comply with any recommendations of the OIA.