

Academic Appeals Policy and Procedure (2025-2027)

Candidates registered with ISVPS

1. Context and Scope

An academic appeal is defined as a challenge or a request for reconsideration of a decision by an academic body which makes decisions on candidate assessment and awards. It may include a request to change marks or final award classifications.

This procedure applies to candidates who are registered with ISVPS. The appeals process is informed by the Good Practice Framework for the Handling of Complaints and Academic Appeals, published by the Office for the Independent Adjudicator in December 2022.

The aim of the procedure is to enable candidates to request a review of an examination/assessment decision published by ISVPS.

2. Dealing with complaints against provision of ISVPS services

Complaints are considered under a separate ISVPS Complaints Policy and will not be reviewed as part of an academic appeals process.

3. Anonymity and Collective appeals

Candidates will not be disadvantaged in any way by making an appeal and it is not necessary for them to submit anonymously, unless for good reason.

The normal expectation is that candidates will submit an appeal against the outcome of a decision which relates to their own results only. There is, however, provision for collective appeals since the discovery of a material error or irregularity (as defined in 8.1) that affected all candidates is likely to result in an outcome that would be applied to all candidates. Where candidates elect to make a collective appeal, they are required to confirm in writing that they nominate a spokesperson to act on their behalf and that all correspondence, including the outcome, will be through the nominated spokesperson.

4. Appointment of a representative

ISVPS expects candidates to make their own representations within this policy. Where a candidate feels unable to do so, they may, exceptionally, request that they be permitted to appoint a representative to act on their behalf. They should make their request in writing, explaining their reasons for making the request. In requesting to nominate a representative, the candidate expressly permits ISVPS to share personal data relating to the investigation, with the named representative, in both determining and reporting on the appeal outcome. The candidate also accepts responsibility for any claims made by their representative on their behalf, including the consequences of any false claims made in their name. If the candidate's request is approved, all communications will be channelled through the representative, although copied to the candidate. Such requests are normally only permitted on significant health grounds and ISVPS right to independent verification of such ground.

5. Frivolous or vexatious appeals

ISVPS may reject an appeal at any time if, in the opinion of ISVPS Academic Manager, the appeal is frivolous or vexatious.

A frivolous or vexatious appeal could include the following:

- complaints or academic appeals which are obsessive, harassing, or repetitive
- insistence on pursuing non-meritorious complaints or academic appeals and/or unrealistic, unreasonable outcomes
- insistence on pursuing what may be meritorious complaints or academic appeals in an unreasonable manner
- demands for redress which lack any serious purpose or value

If the candidate's appeal is considered frivolous or vexatious, the ISVPS Academic Team will write to the candidate explaining that ISVPS is considering terminating further consideration of the appeal, setting out the reasons for doing so, and issue a Completion of Procedures letter.

6. Unacceptable behaviour

ISVPS is committed to providing a fair, consistent and accessible service for all candidates. However, ISVPS must also provide a safe working environment for staff and ensure that work is undertaken in an efficient and effective manner. Whilst all candidates have the right to be heard, understood and respected, staff have the same rights. The actions of appellants, or their nominated representative, who are angry, demanding or persistent, may result in unreasonable demands on, or unacceptable behaviour towards, staff. These actions and behaviours are considered

unacceptable and are managed under this guidance. These behaviours are set out below:

Aggressive, offensive or abusive actions or behaviour

Examples of actions or behaviours grouped under this heading include any that may have the potential to cause staff to feel intimidated, threatened or offended. These include, but are not limited to threats, physical violence, verbal abuse, derogatory remarks, sarcasm and rudeness. Inflammatory statements and unsubstantiated allegations can amount to abusive actions or behaviour. Violence is not restricted to acts of aggression that may result in physical harm. It also includes behaviour or language, whether verbal or written, that may cause staff to feel afraid, threatened or abused.

Unreasonable demands or persistence

Examples of unreasonable demands may include: requesting responses within an unreasonable timescale; insisting on seeing or speaking to a particular member of staff; continual phone calls, emails, or letters; demanding answers to unreasonable, or an excessive number of, questions about the way in which staff would normally discharge their responsibilities or seeking their personal opinions on matters; repeatedly changing the substance of an appeal; or raising unrelated concerns.

When the actions or behaviour of an appellant are unacceptable, they will be informed of why and given the opportunity to modify their actions or behaviour. If the unacceptable actions or behaviour continue, ISVPS will consider terminating review of their appeal.

7. Academic judgement

Candidates may not appeal against the academic judgement of examiners, for example claiming that the marks awarded were too low. Neither can a student appeal because they did not understand, or were not aware of, ISVPS regulations and procedures as set out in their MyImprove Hub, or provided by ISVPS teams, or ISVPS Terms and Conditions.

8. Grounds on which an appeal can be made

There are only three sets of circumstances in which ISVPS results decisions may be changed.

8.1 Material error or irregularity

There was a material administrative error which affected the ISVPS decision. Examples might include that the assessment was not conducted in accordance with the regulations or that ISVPS failed to follow its own procedures.

8.2 Bias or reasonable perception of bias

There is evidence which indicates that the involvement of a particular individual (or individuals) could, intentionally or unintentionally, affect the fairness of the ISVPS

examiner decision or the conduct of the ISVPS assessment process. The candidate would need to have adequate evidence that they could be identified by an examiner and that the marking may have been affected by bias. This may include comments from third parties which records the comments or remarks made by others involved in the assessment. As previously stated, a candidate may not appeal against academic judgement. An examiner may disagree with a student's viewpoint, argument or interpretation of evidence – affecting the mark awarded - but this is a matter of academic judgement and not evidence of bias.

8.3 Mitigating circumstances not known to ISVPS

There were mitigating circumstances which the candidate was unable to divulge, for valid reasons, by the deadline for presenting evidence of mitigating circumstances. The candidate's appeal should be supported by medical certificates or other acceptable documentary evidence which both verify the reasons for not previously divulging the circumstances and substantiate the original mitigating circumstances. A feeling of embarrassment is not an acceptable reason for not divulging mitigating circumstances, since all mitigating circumstances are considered in confidence by a small panel of individuals and are not disclosed beyond those judging the merits of the claim and the impact on a candidate. Any appeal that is based on mitigating circumstance claims and for which there is no or limited evidence will be considered in relation to any other evidence that is presented. Appellants should understand that the outcome of their claim will be based only on evidence that is presented at the time.

Mitigating circumstance evidence should not normally relate to the health or other circumstances of third parties (such as family members) since this is likely to be classed as sensitive personal data under data protection legislation (as amended or superseded from time to time). Instead, appellants should provide evidence that verifies the impact that another's health circumstances have had on themselves as the appellant, without the disclosure of unnecessary detail related to the third party.

Where personal medical information relating to the appellant is submitted, the candidate consents to the use of that personal data for processing purposes, in order to make an assessment of the validity of the appeal claims.

It is important to note that the ISVPS Examination Regulations specify that once a candidate has either a) submitted work for assessment and/or b) entered the examination room, that the candidate has deemed themselves to be fit to take the assessment/examination. Retrospective medical certificates purporting to certify illness at the time when a candidate took the examination, will not be acceptable, unless there is independent evidence to substantiate that a candidate could not reasonably have known that they were unfit to take the examination.

9. Procedure

The Appeals Procedure will be hosted on ISVPS MyImprove Hub to ensure that candidates are aware of their rights of appeal. Authoritative guidance on the operation of the procedure may be sought from ISVPS by emailing appeals@isvps.org

The procedure is conducted in three stages and candidates can only progress to the next stage after they have completed the preceding stage. Candidates must submit requests for assessment decisions to be reviewed within the timescales set out within each stage of the procedure. Only exceptionally, and where there are reasonable grounds for such, would the procedure be varied, at the discretion of ISVPS.

9.1 Stage 1- raising a concern or query

Before submitting a formal appeal, candidates are required to email appeals@isvps.org outlining their concern or queries. Advice will be issued by ISVPS Academic Team within three (3) working days of receipt of that email as to whether there are grounds which could be considered for an appeal. Further feedback on the examination/assessment may be provided if requested.

Candidates are encouraged to raise any concern or query as a matter of urgency as any formal appeal, undertaken as part of stage 2, must be submitted within 30 working days of the notification of the examination/assessment results release.

9.2 Stage 2- formal appeal against the decision of ISVPS

If the candidate decides to submit a formal appeal, the candidate should complete an academic appeals form (available as an editable form in MyImprove Hub or provided on request from appeals@isvps.org). They should send the completed form, along with supporting evidence to: appeals@isvps.org. It is important that all sections of the form are completed within the period allowed for appeals to be submitted. The written appeal must be received in the appeals mailbox within 30 working days of the date that the results were formally released to the candidate. The appeal form should be supported by all available written evidence to substantiate the claims made. The appellant is responsible for providing any evidence that they wish to be considered. Digitised copies of evidence are acceptable, although ISVPS reserves the right to require original paper copies to be provided for verification purposes. Claims which cannot be substantiated with independent evidence are likely to be dismissed. ISVPS reserves the right to seek further information to verify the authenticity, credibility and trustworthiness of all documentary evidence.

9.3

Receipt of a formal appeal, using the correct form through the appeals@isvps.org email box, which will be acknowledged by email, to the email address from which it was received. The ISVPS Academic Team will conduct an investigation. The ISVPS Academic Team will normally take one of the following decisions and notify the candidate accordingly:

- a. to reject the appeal if there is evidence that ISVPS has already taken proper account of the points in the appeal, that the regulations and procedures have been properly implemented, or, for example, that there is no sound reason why mitigating circumstances could not have been revealed before the meeting of the relevant body, or the appeal claim and/or supporting evidence was submitted beyond the published time limit;
- b. if the investigation reveals clear evidence that there has been a material error or irregularity, ISVPS may uphold the appeal
- c. request additional information or seek clarity on unclear or contradictory evidence from the candidate and from others relevant to the investigation, as considered necessary in order to make a well-informed judgement on the claim and conclude with an appropriate outcome.
- d. to apply any combination of (a) to (d) flexibly, if the circumstances of the claim and associated investigations merit such, including the provision for interim or partially upheld appeals, in relation to some, rather than all, aspects of a claim and the requested outcomes.

9.4 The outcome of an appeal will normally be notified to the appellant, in writing, to the original email address, within 28 working days of receipt of the appeals form, advising not only the outcome of the appeal but also outlining the reference points and written evidence, including that received from interested parties used in forming a judgement. In exceptional circumstances, it might be necessary to extend the normal investigation and conclusion time period, in which case the appellant will be advised by ISVPS.

9.5 Stage 3 – review stage

If a candidate remains dissatisfied with the outcome of a formal appeal, a third stage is available with the ISVPS Academic Board. Candidates must email appeals@isvps.org with the completed third stage appeal form within 14 working days of receiving the outcome of the second stage appeal. The email should be headed 'Request for Review of Appeal Outcome'.

Stage 3 appeals may be considered by ISVPS Academic Board against one of the following three reasons:

- that ISVPS procedures at the formal stage did not follow appropriate arrangements.
- that the outcome was unreasonable, in the circumstances.
- new material evidence has become available which the candidate was unable, for valid reasons, to provide earlier in the process.

Stage 3 does not allow appeal against the academic judgement of examiners.

Stage 3 represents the end of the ISVPS Appeal process.

10. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an important factor in conducting appeal investigations. ISVPS will always have regard to any legislative requirements; for example, data protection legislation (as amended or superseded from time to time) and policies on confidentiality and the use of appellant information. Appeals will be handled with an appropriate level of confidentiality and information released only to those who need it for the purposes of investigating or responding to the appeal. No third party will be told any more about the investigation than is strictly necessary to obtain the information required from them. Notwithstanding this provision, information provided as part of an appeal might be used in consideration of an appellant's fitness to study or fitness to practise in a particular profession.

Where appellants provide information about third parties, they should limit any personal information to the essentials, since there is a requirement under data protection legislation to notify third parties of any circumstance in which their data is being processed.

Where an appeal has been raised which involves claims against a candidate or member of staff and those elements have been upheld, the appellant will be advised of this. However, it would not be appropriate to share specific details affecting specific candidates or staff members, particularly where disciplinary action is taken.

11. Review Arrangements

ISVPS will next review this policy December 2027.

If you have any questions about this policy, please contact appeals@isvps.org