



FIE London Complaints & Academic Appeals

First printed August 2015 by
Foundation for International Education
Foundation House, 114 Cromwell Road
London SW7 4ES

(Last Modified January 2017)

Complaints and Academic Appeals

FIE's [Educational Mission](#) is to provide high quality educational experiences to the global community. FIE is also committed to inclusive [values](#) engendering a welcoming, supportive, and inclusive living, learning and working environment for the entire FIE community. As per our Safe Spaces policy, our hope is that everyone in the FIE community - students, faculty, staff, and visitors - knows they can come to any member of staff for help, advice, or just to talk to someone who is supportive.

In this vein, while we sincerely hope that everyone has a positive and fulfilling experience while at FIE, we do welcome constructive feedback from current and recent students as well as faculty and staff and are committed to responding to, and dealing with, complaints in a timely and effective manner.

Feedback

Throughout the experience, there are many opportunities for members of the FIE community to provide informal or formal feedback, whether that be in person to staff or faculty members, or via the many feedback forms (e.g. student course/programme) that are distributed in hard copy or electronically. We encourage everyone, through various avenues and forms, to make effective use of all opportunities for feedback.

Complaints and Academic Appeals

Should someone wish to make an academic appeal or complaint, we take these very seriously and the following procedures should be followed. The instructions must be read carefully to ensure that the correct department or person is contacted. Academic appeals and complaints are dealt with discreetly and in line with data protection and confidentiality considerations. Individuals are encouraged to raise their concern without risk of disadvantage, and all parties are requested to engage constructively with the procedures.

An **Academic appeal** is "A request for reconsideration of a decision of an academic body charged with making decisions on student progress, assessment and awards"¹ and refers to the outcome of the cumulative assessed work throughout an FIE course. An academic appeal may be based on:

¹ QAA, UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B9: Academic appeals and student complaints, (April 2013), p.2

- A procedural irregularity in the assessment process
- Extenuating or mitigating circumstances (guidance on mitigating circumstances is contained in the appendix accompanying this document) where, for good reason, the faculty member was not made aware of a significant factor relating to the assessment of a student when he/she made the original decision. This does not absolve the student from his/her responsibility to ask for 'academic accommodation' in a timely fashion and in conformity with due procedures.
- Bias or perception of bias on part of faculty

The following are not usually considered grounds for an Academic Appeal:

- Where a student questions the exercise of academic judgment. (Students are made aware during their orientation that appeals made purely on the basis of a different estimation of the quality of their work will not be successful)
- Where there is a disagreement about the way extenuating or mitigating circumstances were considered, unless there is clear evidence that FIE's defined procedures were not followed

A **complaint** is defined as "The expression of a specific concern about matters that affect the quality of a student's learning opportunities".² A complaint can also be about the quality of other facets such as housing, facilities, or behaviour (excluding actions that may be more appropriately considered under FIE's Safe Spaces' policy) whether provided by FIE or a third party on behalf of FIE.

Any FIE student, faculty, or staff member, or recent student is able to file a Complaint and is able to appoint an advisor or representative to speak on his/her behalf. FIE will decline appeals from third parties except where they are acting as a complainant's designated representative. Where the issues raised affect a number of individuals, they may submit a Group Complaint. In such circumstances, in order to manage the progression of the Appeal, FIE will ask the group to nominate one person to act as group representative. FIE will then deal with the representative only and expect him/her to liaise with the other members of the group.

There should be confidence in FIE's Complaints process and it should not be necessary to bring anonymous complaints, but the option is available. Exceptionally, however, an anonymous complaint may be considered when FIE accepts that there is a compelling case – supported by evidence – for the matter to be investigated. Complainants must be aware that in many circumstances raising a concern anonymously may impede an investigation and

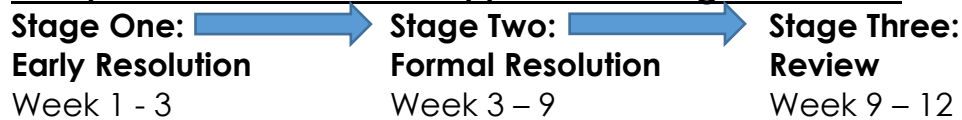
² Ibid

communication of the outcome. It must also be highlighted that an anonymous complaint pursued at length and with insistence on a resolution may unavoidably involve some breach of anonymity or potentially face a non-resolution.

Anyone may seek guidance and discuss the issue with their Residence Life Supervisor, FIE Mentor, or a member of staff/faculty whom they feel comfortable speaking to. FIE also has confidential access to a counsellor (via the Student Life Team).

Information gathered during the Complaints Process is used to improve services and experiences for the future.

Complaints and Academic Appeals Handling Procedures



(Full process up to 12 weeks)

Swift and effective resolution to straightforward complaints and initial conversations with faculty

Complaints that have not been resolved informally. First formal stage for academic appeals

Dissatisfaction after conclusion of the first formal stage. Review of new material and evidence that was unable to be provided at an earlier stage for valid reasons. Request for formal Academic Review. (detailed below)

Complaints

Safe Spaces

Inappropriate and derogatory comments and actions, as deemed by FIE senior management, are not tolerated and any such behaviour brought to the attention of FIE faculty and staff is addressed in an educational and informative manner. Everyone at FIE has a right to their opinion; however, if someone is stating myths or misinformation then FIE faculty and staff will inform them of more accurate information in a respectful manner.

Early Resolution

1. The complainant should contact a relevant member of staff or faculty, or the departmental coordinator if it is a general issue, via email. Please contact the administration staff for FIE team and faculty contact details or alternatively complete the 'Contact Form' on the link below:
www.fie.org.uk/about-us/our-team
2. If the complainant feels uneasy approaching a member of staff/faculty, or the departmental coordinator, s/he should contact the team manager/director as appropriate via email (see links to contact details above).
3. Questions to consider in attempting Early Resolution could include:
 - a. What specifically is the concern about and which area(s) of FIE is/are involved?
 - b. What outcome is hoped for and can it be achieved?
 - c. Is the concern straightforward and likely to be resolved with little or no investigation?
 - d. Can it be resolved quickly by providing, where appropriate, an explanation, alternative solution, or apology?
 - e. Is there merit in using confidential mediation or conciliation with agreement?
4. If responsibility for the issue raised lies in the staff member's area of work, every attempt should be made to resolve the concern in consultation with the complainant. If responsibility lies elsewhere, the staff member should liaise with the relevant area to facilitate swift resolution, rather than simply passing the complaint on to another office.
5. In all likelihood, at this stage the relevant parties will have been able to resolve the issue informally. Where proportionate, a written outcome is provided.
6. Where it is clear that Early Resolution is not appropriate or possible and that a concern will need to proceed immediately to the Formal stage the complainant should be promptly directed.

If the complainant feels that the issue has not been resolved to his/her satisfaction, he/she can seek formal resolution via the official complaints process.

N.B. Formal resolution should only be sought as a last resort once all of the above opportunities for informal resolution have been exhausted.

A **Formal Complaint** is used where

- A complainant declines to engage with Early Resolution and initiates a Formal Complaint in line with FIE procedures; or
 - There is dissatisfaction with the outcome of Early Resolution; or
 - Early Resolution is not possible or suitable due to the character, complexity, or seriousness of the case.
1. The complainant submits his/her complaint via email to complaint@fie.org.uk, fully detailing the issue, the steps s/he has taken to resolve the issue informally (see *Early Resolution* above), as well as providing any supporting documentation. This email address is monitored by a member of FIE's Senior Management Team. Students, faculty and staff are assured that their complaint will be reviewed fairly and objectively.
 2. Key questions considered could include:
 - a. Is this a Complaint, Safe Spaces issue, or an Academic Appeal? Should the complainant be referred to another procedure?
 - b. Was Early Resolution attempted? If not, can the matter be referred back to that stage?
 - c. Is it clearly set out what the complaint is about and which area(s) of FIE is/are involved?
 - d. Has evidence been provided in support of the complaint?
 - e. What outcome is hoped for and can it be achieved?
 - f. Is the complaint suitable for mediation or conciliation?
 3. Special attention is given to identifying complaints that may require particularly swift action and may include:
 - a. A threat of serious harm
 - b. Issues raised that have detrimental consequences for a person's mental health or where the complainant displays significant distress
 - c. Complaints relating to disability support/academic accommodations
 - d. Issues of serious and repeated service failure and/or significant delay
 - e. Issues of a highly sensitive nature (gender; race related etc.)
 4. Upon receipt of a Formal Complaint, FIE's Senior Manager will undertake an initial evaluation to confirm the complaint is submitted under the correct procedure. It is essential that both FIE's Senior Manager and the complainant understand the purpose and scope of the investigation and the Senior Manager will consider meeting with

the student to facilitate this. If the expectations appear to go beyond what FIE can reasonably provide or what is in our power to provide then the complainant will be advised of this as soon as possible via email in order to manage expectations about possible outcomes.

5. If the issue requires further action all relevant parties will be kept well informed of the progress until a timely resolution is reached.
6. The complainant will receive a formal response via email that may include suggestions for mediation or conciliation, where appropriate. The decision will also give information about a student's final right to appeal to their home campus.

Academic Appeals

Early Resolution

1. A student who is dissatisfied with an assignment grade should first approach the member of faculty who has given the grade via email (look at course syllabi for email or contact administration office). The member of faculty should be able to provide a clear explanation via email as to how s/he arrived at the grade, referring to the FIE grading rubric as well as the assignment instructions and Assignment Level Learning Outcomes. It must be noted that query of academic judgement is not as a rule acceptable because a disputed grade is a reflection of an academic judgement on the part of the faculty.
 2. If there has been a clerical or calculation error and the final grade has already been submitted to FIE, the faculty member will complete a Grade Change Form and advise the student and FIE Academic and Administration teams via email.
-

Formal Appeal

1. If the student remains dissatisfied with his/her final grade after correspondence with their member of faculty, s/he may bring the matter forward for consideration by **the peer faculty** (another member of the faculty team) on FIE's Teaching and Learning Committee. The student should do so by contacting FIE's Teaching and Learning Development Officer via email to academics@fie.org.uk who will ask the student to submit an Academic Appeal Form. Together with the submission of the Academic Appeal Form, the student must also provide evidence of the faculty member's comments together with documentary evidence of assignments submitted.
2. Key questions considered:
 - a. Is this a complaint or academic appeal? Should the student be referred to another procedure?
 - b. Has the student set out clearly what the Academic Appeal is about?
 - c. Has the student provided evidence in support of the Academic Appeal?
 - d. What outcome is the student hoping for and can it be achieved?
3. All appeals must be received within 15 days of receipt of final grades. Appeals must always be via email and accompanied by a detailed rationale for requesting a review and supported with relevant documentation.

4. The student will be provided with an email detailing the outcome of the Formal Appeal within 30 days of receipt of the Appeal. The decision will also give information about:
 - a. The student's right to take the Academic Appeal to Review
 - b. The grounds on which a Review can be undertaken
 - c. The time limit for escalating to the Review Appeal
 5. If the student does not take the Formal Appeal to Review within the time limit for doing so then FIE will close the matter
-

The Request for Academic Review

If a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of his/her Formal Appeal, s/he may be able to request a Review. The Review will not usually consider the issues afresh or involve further investigation, rather it will be confined to:

- A review of the procedures followed at the Formal Appeal
- A consideration of whether the outcome was reasonable and fair in the larger context
- New material evidence which the student was unable, for valid reasons, to provide earlier in the process

A Formal Appeal must have been considered before it can be escalated to a Request for Review.

1. If the student requests a Review, then s/he does so via email for consideration by FIE's Chief Academic Officer (Contact details available at www.fie.org.uk/about-us/our-team).
2. Key questions considered:
 - a. Were the relevant procedures followed during the Formal Appeal?
 - b. Was the outcome reasonable in all the circumstances?
 - c. Has the student received clear reasons why the Academic Appeal was rejected at the Formal stage?
 - d. If new material evidence has been provided, has the student given valid reasons for not supplying this earlier?
 - e. What outcome is the student hoping for and can it be achieved?
3. A Request for Review must be received within 15 days of receipt of the Formal Appeal response email. A Request for Review must always be via email and accompanied by a detailed rationale for requesting a review and supported with relevant documentation.
4. The student will be provided with an email detailing the outcome of the Request for Review within 15 days. The decision will also give

information about the student's final right to appeal to their home campus or FIE's School of Record for review.

Conclusion

- The complaints procedure may seem quite formalistic and complex. The design makes the procedure a bit rigid in order to make sure that decisions are taken correctly and satisfactorily. The object is to resolve the matter without any apparent confusion, doubt or favouritism. It is believed that a comprehensive facts findings process maximises the scope of taking a fair and accurate decision. Thus, the concentration is on the fact-finding process and the apparent fairness of the proceedings.
- If after following FIE's complaints procedures and you are still unsatisfied, under some circumstances, you may also be able to submit a complaint to:
 - The British Accreditation Council - <http://www.the-bac.org/bac-complaints-procedure/>
 - The Office of the Independent Adjudicator - <http://oiahe.org.uk/making-a-complaint-to-the-oia/how-to-make-a-complaint.aspx>