

AFTER THE EXAMS: When things go wrong with your exams

Who is this leaflet for?

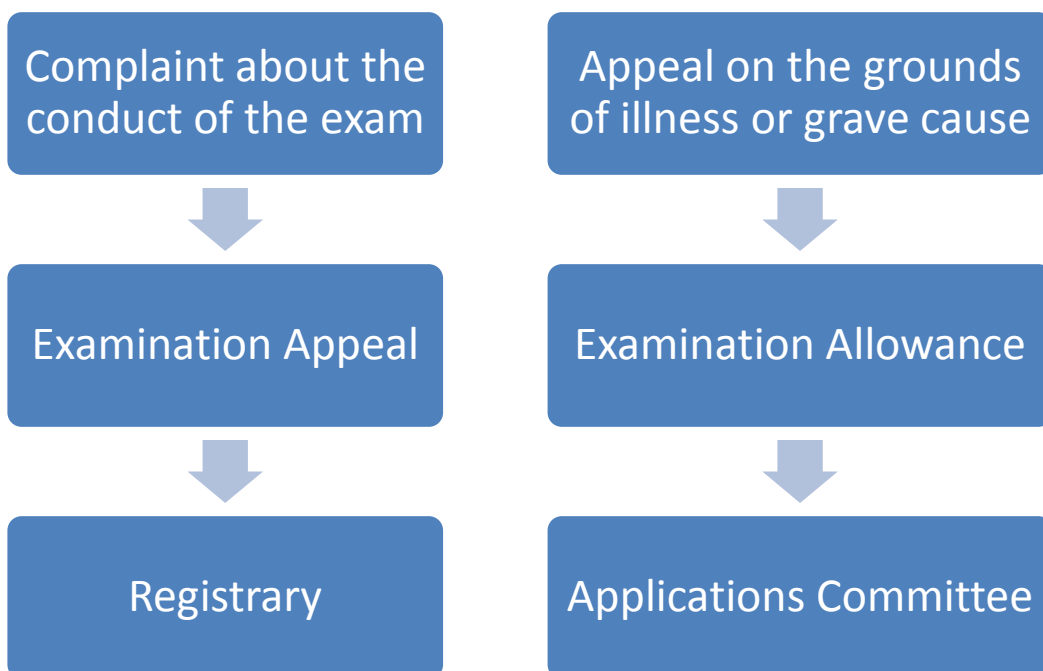
- Cambridge University students taking University examinations that do not fall under the authority of the Board of Graduate Studies
- NOT for prelims or College exams
- NOT for professional exams such as M.B., B.Chir., Vet.M.B. or LL.M. exams

This leaflet

These notes have been drawn up by the CUSU/GU Student Advice Service and are for guidance only. Their main purpose is to make the existing regulations comprehensible. They don't overrule the Statutes and Ordinances. You can find references to the relevant regulations at the bottom of each section, but if in any doubt, you can speak to any member of the Student Advice Service team.

Examination Appeals vs. Examination Allowances

Examination Appeals (which the University calls 'representations') relate solely to the conduct of the exam(s). If you want to appeal on the grounds of **illness or grave cause**, you need to follow a separate procedure for → [Examination Allowances](#).



Examination Appeals – complaints about the conduct of the exam

Technical problems → before the results come out

If you want to alert the examiners to technical problems which occurred during the exam, such as mistakes in the question paper or a disturbance in an examination room, your Tutor will need to contact the Registry within three days (excluding Saturday and Sunday) following your final examination, by 4pm.

The Examiners will be asked to take the matter into account before drawing up the results and completing the Class List. You and your Tutor will be informed within one week of class list publication of the action taken by the Examiners in response to your appeal.

If your notification about the technical problems reaches the Chairman of Examiners after their final meeting the same process as for the → [Examination Review](#) will be followed.

Regulations: Ordinances, Chapter III, Examinations – Regulation 3 (timing) and 5, p.239

Key facts:

What: technical problems

When: within three days after your final exam, by 4pm.

Who: your Tutor to the Registry

What next? If you are concerned about technical problems that arose during the exam you should tell your Tutor as soon as possible in order to ensure that the examiners can take this into account before drawing up the class list.

Examination Review → after results have come out

If you think that you didn't do as well as hoped in your exam or failed because of the way the exam was conducted, you (or your Tutor on your behalf) can request a review (= 'appeal') of your exam result. Such appeals will only be considered if they relate to the *conduct of the exam*, excluding circumstances relating to your course of study, and are usually based on one or more of the following criteria:

- a. that **material circumstances** existed about the conduct of the exam of which the Examiners were unaware; (e.g. errors on the question paper)
- b. that **procedural irregularities** occurred in the conduct of the exam, which casts reasonable doubt as to whether the Examiners would have reached the same conclusion had the irregularities not occurred; (for example, if your course handbook states that where the marks given on a particular script by two examiners differ by more than 10% a third examiner should look at the script, and you can show that this wasn't the case, this would constitute a procedural irregularity.)
- c. that there is **evidence of prejudice, bias or inadequate assessment** in the examinations process.

Note that you *cannot* appeal against academic judgment.

What is Academic Judgement?

Academic judgment is a judgment that is made by an academic about a matter where only the opinion of an academic expert will suffice; for example, a judgment about the validity or strength of your argument, your eventual class mark, or research methodology. Note that an appeal based *solely* on your

own estimation of your work, even where this is supported by your DoS or supervisor, is unlikely to be successful.

Requests for review not relating to one of the three criteria above will usually be dismissed.

You or your Tutor will need to make a request for an Examination Review to the Registry within one month after the class list is posted outside Senate House.

What will happen after my appeal?

Your appeal will be considered by the Chairman of Examiners and at least two other examiners. Usually this will involve merely a 'clerical check': checking that the marks indicated by the examiners correspond to those in the mark book and add up to the mark listed in the classlist. Note that it is *very* unlikely that your scripts will be remarked.

What next? Get help as soon as possible. Usually, this will be your **Tutor**, who can request an Examination Review on your behalf. Your Tutor will normally be able to advise you on University procedures and can explore your options with you. If you don't feel comfortable raising your concerns with your own Tutor, you can also speak to any other Tutor or Senior Tutor in your college. You can also submit a request for an Examination Review yourself, without the support of a Tutor, but you may find it helpful to discuss your situation with someone and have a second pair of eyes look over it. If you encounter any problems or are in any doubt, get in touch with the **Student Advice Service**.

Regulations: Ordinances, Chapter III, Examinations – Regulations 4 (timing) and 6, p.239-240

Key facts:

What: material circumstances, procedural irregularities or prejudice, bias or inadequate assessment

When: address this within one month of the class list being published

Who: you or your Tutor to the Registry

Appeal against the outcome of an Examination Review ('Review of the Review')

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of an **Examination Review**, you can submit a full statement of complaint to the Registry within three months of the date on which the report from the Chairman of Examiners was communicated. A **Review Committee** consisting of members not previously involved with your exam will then consider your case. These will not usually be experts in that subject and their decision will not override the original academic judgment. They will cross-reference your appeal against the three criteria mentioned above:

- a. that **material circumstances** existed about the conduct of the exam of which the Examiners were unaware; (e.g. errors on the question paper)
- b. that **procedural irregularities** occurred in the conduct of the exam, which casts reasonable doubt as to whether the Examiners would have reached the same conclusion had the irregularities not occurred; (for example, if your course handbook states that where the marks given on a particular script by two examiners differ by more than 10% a third examiner should look at the script, and you can show that this wasn't the case, this would constitute a procedural irregularity.)
- c. that there is **evidence of prejudice, bias or inadequate assessment** in the examinations process

If the Review Committee is satisfied that you have grounds for appeal it can invite you and other persons concerned to a hearing, to which you can be accompanied by a representative. If your case is upheld, then your work can be re-assessed by the original or new examiners (or, in the case of progression to the M.Eng., M.Math., or M.Sci the Faculty Board).

Should you remain to be dissatisfied with the outcome after this you can appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). This is an external body set up to review student complaints in England and Wales.

Regulations: Ordinances, Chapter III, Examinations – Regulations 7-20, p.240-242

Key facts:

What: dissatisfied with the outcome of the Exam Review

When: within three months after you have been sent the report from the Chairman of Examiners

Who: you to the Registry

Appeal for progression to the M.Eng., M.Math. or M.Sci.

If you want to progress to do an M.Eng., M.Math. or M.Sci Degree (usually your fourth year) you need permission from your Faculty Board or comparable authority. If you have not received permission to do so, you can appeal against that decision. In such a case you need to follow the procedure of the → [Examination Review](#).

FAQ – Examination Appeals

When will I find out whether my appeal has been successful?

Technical problems: If your Tutor notified the Registry of technical problems before the results were published, you and your Tutor will be informed **within one week** of class list publication of the action taken by the Examiners in response to your appeal.

Examination Review: The request ('representation') for an Examination Review that you or your Tutor submitted to the Registry will be passed on to the Chairman of the Examiners. **Within one month** after that the Chairman will submit a report to the Registry explaining what action has been taken as a result of your request. The Registry will then pass on this report to you and your Tutor and Senior Tutor.

How likely is it that my request for an Exam Review is going to be upheld?

Each request is considered on its individual merits. It can be helpful to gain the support of the College when making the request, but this is not essential. Thorough evidence and a well-presented case, related to at least one of the three appeals criteria, are key to a successful appeal.

Who will decide over my request for an Examination Review?

The Registry will pass on your request for an Examination Review to the Chairman of Examiners, who – together with at least two other Examiners – will reconsider your exam in the light of the arguments set out in your request.

What if my request for an Examination Review is unsuccessful?

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of your request for an Exam Review you can ask for a 'review of the review'. For this please refer to the section → [Appeal against the outcome of an Examination Review \('Review of the Review'\)](#).

Examination Allowances – illness or grave cause

If you have been hindered by illness or other grave cause in preparing for or taking your exams, you may be eligible for an Examination Allowance. Any application for an Exam Allowance will need to be made through a Tutor (or the Senior Tutor) from your College, together with evidence of the medical circumstances or other grave cause, as well as your supervision reports. The College will also be asked explicitly whether or not it supports the application. It will also need to apply, on your behalf, for ONE specific outcome.

If you did not pass your exams, i.e. didn't obtain Honours, there are five possible outcomes:

1. DDH stands for "deemed to have deserved Honours" and means that the evidence indicates that you would normally have achieved Honours in the exam, or that the class mark you have initially received does not represent your abilities.
2. You can proceed to the next year of study as though you had passed the exam; "allowed the examination" appears on the transcript. (It's comparable to being awarded a 'pass'.)
3. If you are "put in standing", you are eligible to proceed to the next exam or Part of the Tripos. The exam is listed on your transcript but no result is recorded.
4. If you are a Part II student and have passed your Part I but failed Part II, IIA or IIB, you may be awarded an "Ordinary Degree", i.e. graduate with BA (Ord) rather than BA (Hons).
5. You can 'degrade', meaning that you can intermit your studies at Cambridge, usually to return the next year. You may be able to re-sit the exam(s) the following year. Note that it is very rare that you would be allowed to degrade 'retrospectively' at such a late stage in the year.

If you passed but got a lower grade than expected:

1. you can be awarded DDH (see the above paragraph)
2. the examiners can be invited to reconsider their original decision and award you a higher class mark. Note that this happens *only in very rare circumstances* where you have achieved a higher grade in all but a relatively small proportion of the exam and where you can provide evidence of illness or grave cause.

What next? Get help as soon as possible. Usually, this will be your **Tutor**, through whom any application for an Examination Allowance would need to be made. Your Tutor will normally be able to advise you on University procedures and can explore your options with you. If you don't feel comfortable raising your concerns with your own Tutor, you can also speak to any other Tutor or Senior Tutor in your college. If you encounter any problems or are in any doubt, get in touch with the **Student Advice Service**.

Important point: If you want to apply for an Examination Allowance on the grounds of illness, you should obtain **medical evidence** as early as possible, preferably while you are not well and *before* sitting the exams.

Regulations: Ordinances Chapter III, Examinations – Allowances for Candidates for Examinations, Regulations 3-8 (p.230-232)

Key facts:

What: you have been hindered by illness or other grave cause in preparing for or taking your exams

When: as soon as possible after you get your exam results

Who: your Tutor to the Applications Committee

Appeal against the outcome of a request for an Examination Allowance

If you are not satisfied with the outcome, you or your Tutor (with your consent) can appeal the decision. A request for review must be made in writing, stating the grounds of review, normally within three weeks of written notification of the Applications Committee's decision.

The University then appoints a reviewer who has not been previously involved and who will consider both the request and the original decision.

The Applications Committee will usually accept the recommendation of the reviewer, but if not (exceptionally), it will issue a written explanation.

If you are unsatisfied with the outcome of the review, you can appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). This is an external body set up to review student complaints in England and Wales.

Regulations: Ordinances , Chapter I, The Council – Review of Decisions of the Applications Committee (p.113)

Key facts:

What: dissatisfied with the outcome of the request for an Examination Allowance

When: within three weeks of written notification of the Applications Committee's decision

Who: you or your Tutor to the Applications Committee

FAQ – Examination Allowances

When will I find out whether my application for an Examination Allowance has been successful?

The Applications Committee meets once every month, and your College would usually hear back from them within a couple of days of that. Your College will be asked to pass on the notification to you. The June meeting is reserved for cases relating to finalists who without an allowance would not be eligible to graduate. All other applications for examination allowances will be referred to the July meeting. You can view the dates of the meetings on their website: www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/exams/applications.

What is the Applications Committee?

The Applications Committee primarily exists to make decisions on Exam Allowances, applications to degrade and requests to withhold names from class lists. It consists of ten academics, often including

current or past Senior Tutors, three of which are medical advisers. You can find out the current membership on the website: www.admin.cam.ac.uk/offices/exams/applications. The Applications Committee does not have the power to award extra marks, but under certain circumstances (as explained above) it can invite the examiners to reconsider your exam.

Who will see my personal medical evidence?

Once your application has gone through your College, medical evidence is treated strictly confidential and is disclosed only to the medical members of the Applications Committee; other members of the Committee do not see this part of the application. If you submit medical evidence, you will be asked to submit a form giving permission for your medical evidence to be disclosed to the medical members of the Committee.

How likely is it that my application for an Examination Allowance is going to be upheld?

Each application is considered on its individual merits. It can be helpful to gain the support of the College, but strictly speaking this is not essential. Thorough evidence and a well-presented case are key to a successful application.

What if my application for an Examination Allowance is unsuccessful?

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of the application, you or your Tutor (with your consent) can appeal the decision. Please refer to the section → [Appeal against the outcome of a request for an Examination Allowance](#).

Am I automatically kicked out when I fail my exams?

No. The prevalent practice is that you can gain Honours as long as your average grade is a pass – however, restrictions may apply in your course, so refer to the course handbook and seek advice if in any doubt! If you were ill or had other grave cause, your Tutor can apply for an → [Exam Allowance](#) on your behalf. If you suspect something might have been wrong with the way the exam was conducted, you or your Tutor can request an → [Exam Review](#).

How do I submit my appeal?

Any applications to the Applications Committee must be submitted via your College. Requests for an Examination Review or a 'Review of the Review', however, you can make yourself. These need to be submitted to the [Registry](#).

The Registry is the University of Cambridge's senior administrative officer. The current Registry is Dr Jonathan Nicholls, The Old Schools, Trinity Lane, Cambridge CB2 1TN. Note that he will not be able to advise you on the likelihood of the success of your appeal or help you in preparing your submission. In that case please contact the Student Advice Service or a Tutor of your College.

When submitting an Appeal or request for an Exam Review to the Registry, please copy all correspondence to Ms Lyn Davis, Appeals and Mitigating Circumstances, Student Registry, 4 Mill Lane; ld204@admin.cam.ac.uk.

Other Leaflets available from the Student Advice Service

What happens if I don't do as well in my exam(s) as hoped?

Further Information and Advice

Student Advice Service

The Student Advice Service offers free, confidential and independent support and advice to all students at the University of Cambridge.

www.camstudentadvice.co.uk
advice@camstudentadvice.co.uk

01223 746 999

CUSU: Old Exam Hall, New Museums Site

GU: 17 Mil Lane

