

## What happens if I don't do as well in my exams as I had hoped?

### *Who this leaflet is 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

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.

### *Studying at Cambridge*

Many students who come to Cambridge are used to being at the 'top of the heap' in their school. When at Cambridge, you will be studying alongside many other strong students and you may feel that everyone is doing much better than you. Not getting the grade you aspired to can be a disheartening experience. But this interpretation may be different from what the University calls 'failing' an exam, i.e. not achieving Honours. Anything above (and including!) a Third means you have passed your exams.

### *Extra support*

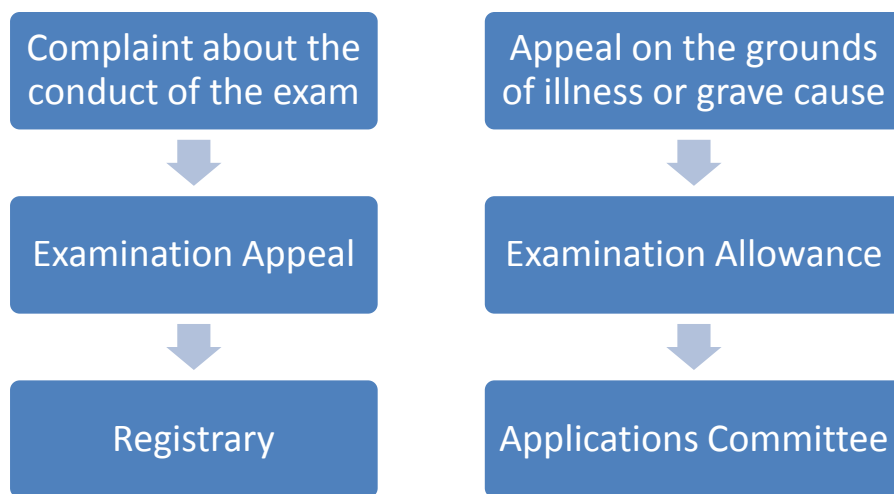
If you are not in your final year and pass but don't do as well as hoped you may want to ask your Director of Studies or Tutor for extra support. This could be in the form of additional supervisions or study skills workshops, for example. The College may also set you some tasks over the summer holidays to help you catch up and prepare for the year ahead; and you may be asked to sit College exams at the beginning of Michaelmas Term.

### *Exam Allowances and Exam Reviews*

Your results may also be lower than expected if you have missed some or all of your exams, even if your College submitted an advance notice (an 'Examination Warning'). In such a case an → [Examination Allowance](#) is a possible option (see below).

If you were ill **or had other grave cause** which prevented you from properly preparing for or sitting your exams, go to → [Examination Allowances](#).

If you would like to **complain against the conduct of the exam**, go to → [Examination Review](#).



### Examination Allowance

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 would like to apply for an Examination Allowance on the grounds of illness, you should obtain **medical evidence** as early as possible, preferably while you are still unwell and *before* sitting the exams.

**Key facts:**

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

**When:** address this as soon as possible after you get your exam results

**Who:** speak to your Tutor about making an application on your behalf to the Applications Committee

## Examination Review

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 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**.

### **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

## **Relevant regulations: Statutes and Ordinances**

These notes are for guidance only and are intended to make the regulations ('Statutes and Ordinances') comprehensible. They don't overrule the Statutes and Ordinances. You can read up on the regulations online at [www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/so](http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/so). If in any doubt, seek advice!

- Exam Allowance: Chapter III, Examinations – Allowances for Candidates for Examinations, Regulations Regulations 3-8 (p.230-232)
- Exam Review: Chapter III, Examinations – Review Procedure (p.239)

## **FAQ**

### ***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](http://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.

### ***What is a 'grave cause'?***

A grave cause may be related to a personal matter which is usually unanticipated and beyond your control, such as the death of a close relative or partner.

### ***What if my appeal/ application is unsuccessful?***

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your application for an Exam Allowance or your Exam Appeal, you can ask for a review:

- For the Exam Allowance, you need to appeal to the Applications Committee **within three weeks** of the notification of the original decision.
- For the Exam Appeal, you can request a review **within three months**.

### ***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](mailto:ld204@admin.cam.ac.uk).

### ***Where can I find out more?***

- Student Advice Service leaflet "AFTER THE EXAMS"
- your Tutor/ another Tutor/ Senior Tutor
- Student Advice Service

## **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](http://www.camstudentadvice.co.uk)  
[advice@camstudentadvice.co.uk](mailto:advice@camstudentadvice.co.uk)

01223 746 999

CUSU: Old Exam Hall, New Museums Site  
GU: 17 Mil Lane