

Academic Appeals and Complaints Policy

Digital Marketing School is dedicated to providing a high-quality student experience. However, we recognise that students may sometimes become dissatisfied. Where concerns are brought to our attention we commit to investigating the matters raised, clarifying regulatory or procedural issues and, where appropriate, taking the necessary steps to provide remedy and redress.

If a student wishes to make a complaint or submit an academic appeal, they should follow the guidance below.

It is understood that making a complaint or submitting an academic appeal is a serious matter and it is treated as such by DMS. All submissions under this Procedure are treated confidentially and students should be assured that raising a grievance of any kind will not negatively impact their academic progress or standing with DMS.

It is our principal aim to resolve any complaint or problem quickly, fairly and simply at the informal stage (see Stage One, below).

A. Explanation of key terms:

1. Student Complaint

We regard a complaint as any expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action, or the standard of service provided by us or on our behalf. Appeals against applications of the regulations, or decisions made by us (including responses to progression and refund requests) are also considered as complaints.

2. Academic Judgement

Academic judgement refers to the determination of a matter where the opinion of an academic expert is essential. You may not complain about, or appeal against, a matter of academic judgement. For example, disagreement with an assessment mark or classification decision is not grounds for appeal.

3. Academic Appeal

We can only consider an academic appeal when it relates to:

- Serious circumstances which the Board of Examiners was not aware of when confirming the final mark, and which you were, for valid reasons, unable or unwilling to disclose earlier
- Procedural irregularities in the conduct of assessment
- Evidence of prejudice or bias

4. Throughout the Procedure for Student Complaints and Academic Appeals (the Procedure), ‘we’ ‘us’ and ‘our’ mean the Digital Marketing School; ‘you’ and ‘your’ mean the complainant or appellant.

5. ‘Working day’ is defined as a day when DMS is open for business and excludes public holidays and seasonal closures, such as Christmas and Easter.

B. Guidance for using the Procedure

1. Who can use the Procedure?

- Any current student
- Groups of current students
- Recent alumni, when within the timeframes indicated below

2. Timeframe for making a submission

A complaint or academic appeal should be raised as soon as possible and within 28 calendar days (4 weeks) of an incident taking place, or of you becoming aware of the issue. For an academic appeal this would usually be 4 weeks after your release of results. After that period, the basis of any complaint or appeal shall normally be deemed to have lapsed.

3. The Procedure does cover:

- Complaints about service provision (for example, processes relating to registration, examination, enquiry management)
- Complaints about the quality of the student learning experience (for example, study materials)
- Appeals against the application of the regulations (for example, progression or transfer decisions)
- Appeals against administrative decisions made by us (for example, refund requests)
- Academic appeals
- Allegations of harassment

4. The Procedure does not cover:

- Appeals against exam results. You cannot appeal against academic judgement.
- Appeals against the outcome of disciplinary processes (including assessment offence penalties). Please refer to the appeals process within the appropriate procedure.
- Complaints from anonymous individuals or from an un-attributable source.
- Appeals against admissions decisions

C. The Procedure

At all stages of the Procedure you are invited to communicate clearly and concisely, identifying the core issue(s) and stating what your desired outcome is. This will help us when responding to your submission. It is also important that you provide any evidence you have to support your case as early as possible in the process.

1. Stage One: Informal Stage

Local resolution within the appropriate department of the DMS.

- a. In most instances your initial contact should be through your tutor
- b. Complaints should first be raised, wherever possible, with the member of staff you have been dealing with on the issue in question.
- c. If you are not yet in correspondence with a member of staff, please open a new query.
- d. Consideration of a complaint at this stage may involve referral to other members of staff in order to seek resolution. It is normally expected that if a complaint cannot be resolved at the early stages, it will be escalated to the line manager of that functional area before Stage One can be considered complete. It is the responsibility of the line manager to ensure that complaints relating to their department are resolved in a fair and expeditious manner.
- e. A record of all correspondence and telephone calls will be maintained.

2. Stage Two: Formal Stage

Investigation by the Director

2.1 The following matters can be referred to Stage Two:

- Complaints not resolved at Stage One
- Academic appeals
- Allegations of harassment – in line with Guidance for Students on Preventing and Responding to Harassment

2.2 Where you are requesting escalation of a complaint not resolved at Stage One of the Procedure your submission must be made within 28 calendar days (4 weeks) of your Stage One outcome and include details of efforts already made to resolve the issue and explain why you remain dissatisfied.

2.3 In exceptional circumstances, and at the discretion of the Associate Director: Student Affairs, a case that has not completed Stage One may be considered at Stage Two if there is a clear reason for doing so. If you believe this applies to you, you should explain why in your submission.

2.4 You will normally receive an acknowledgement by email within three working days and, following a review of your submission, confirmation of whether it has been accepted at Stage Two.

2.6 If your submission is not accepted, or further information is required from you in order for a decision to be made, you will be informed of the next steps.

2.7 An investigation will be conducted by the Director or a case-handler acting on their behalf. This may include the gathering and verification of evidence, further consultation with involved parties, requests for additional information from the student, and escalation to obtain the necessary authority for a pending outcome, where appropriate.

2.8 You will receive a letter from the Director informing you of the outcome, normally within 20 working days of receipt of your case.

2.9 If our investigation will take longer than 20 working days, we will tell you. We will notify you of the revised time limits and keep you updated on progress.

3. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator

3.1 Following completion of all stages of the Procedure, if you remain dissatisfied with the outcome, you can submit a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

3.2 Please note that the OIA require a Completion of Procedures letter, issued from the office of the Director, before a complaint is considered eligible under the rules of their scheme.

3.3 For details of the OIA, the rules of their scheme and how to make a submission, please refer to their website: <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>