

ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

FOR STUDENTS ON ACCESS COURSES

*All appeals and complaints about the outcome or conduct of your Access course should be sent to LASER no later than **one month from the Final Award Board for your programme of study**, but you are advised to start this process as soon as possible after receiving your results.*

Introduction

1. This document sets out LASER's procedures for considering complaints and appeals from students studying on a LASER validated Access to HE Diploma course.
2. These procedures specifically cover:
 - Student appeals against the processes relating to assessment decisions.
 - Student complaints in relation to the course upon which they have been studying.
3. **Please note any student appeal or complaint about an Access Diploma course (including representations against assessment related decisions) must be initially addressed to the college which provides the Access to HE Diploma unless the appeal/complaint arises following receipt of results, at this point please forward direct to LASER.**

Students only have a right of appeal or complaint to LASER where they have exhausted the provider's appeals/complaints procedures. This subsequent appeal/complaint to LASER will only be considered on the grounds that the procedures applied by the college/provider were unfair or were not properly applied in relation to the appellant/complainant's circumstances. Where a student is unhappy with a decision in relation to the grading of their work they should consider making a 'Representation', which is the name given to the process of appealing a grade within the QAA Grade Scheme Regulations (See Section C Annex One). This should be undertaken at the earliest possible opportunity upon receipt of the marked assessment. LASER does not intervene in the case of disputed academic judgements in relation to assessment decisions at an individual student level, as all assessment decisions are internally taken and quality assured by the college/provider and then externally quality assured by an independent LASER appointed Quality Assurer. Where a student wishes to contest such judgments, a representation remains the only mechanism for doing so under the QAA Grade Scheme Regulations.

All Appeals under the QAA Grade Scheme Regulations are restricted to situations where there is:

- Evidence of administrative or procedural error.
- Evidence of extenuating circumstances that, for good reason, could not be notified prior to the awards board.

For the avoidance of doubt, Appeals relate to specific decisions taken by an Award Board and will focus on an explicit decision, which the appellant will argue was made in error (either because regulations were not followed or because of information not available to the Award Board at the time of the decision).

A Complaint relates to more general concerns in relation to the provision and may not be directly linked to a specific award board decision.

Where a student wishes to appeal or complain it is of the utmost importance that they provide a clear chronology and narrative account of the nature of the Appeal / Complaint which is supported by all available evidence.

LASER does not set (or mark) any external assessments on Access to HE Diploma titles.

The process for making a complaint/appeal

4. In the first instance complainants/appellants are advised to raise and discuss any concerns with a tutor or course manager at the provider offering the Access to HE Diploma, in order to ascertain whether the matter can be resolved without adopting formal procedures. The LASER **Student Complaint/Appeal Form** should be used to lodge a complaint or appeal with the college.
5. If this does not resolve the issue, then the complainant must fully exhaust all appeals/complaint procedures at the organisation that provides the Access to HE Diploma. If the matter cannot be resolved the following procedures will be followed.
6. Complaints/appeals should normally be made in writing (email accepted) as soon as possible after the conclusion of the internal appeals process within the college/organisation providing the Access Diploma course (and no later than one calendar month from said point). All appeals and complaints should be made to the LASER Access Quality Manager c/o Canterbury Innovation Centre, University Road, Canterbury, CT2 7FG. Contact details can be found on the LASER web site www.laser-awards.org.uk. Alternatively, documentation can be sent via e-mail to accessenquiries@Laser-awards.org.uk
7. All complaints/appeals should be clearly identified as a formal complaint/appeal. The appeal should include the basis and grounds for the appeal and provide a detailed chronological narrative and evidence to support the appeal (including an indication of what remedy is sought). Students are advised to ensure that they associate all evidence relevant to any appeal or complaint with the Complaint form (photocopies or scanned documents will suffice). Evidence supplied must be appropriate to the nature of the appeal or complaint and should clearly be applicable to the case being forwarded. Where possible the student narrative should refer to evidence explicitly and explain any contextual issues arising such that the evidence is clearly linked to the nature of the specific appeal / complaint. For example, where medical evidence is employed it must clearly provide valid and appropriate detail which supports the specific case being made and should not be general and unrelated to the circumstances of the complaint.
8. Alternatively, if there is some other form of evidence being employed in mitigation

then this must be clearly linked to the circumstances of the appeal / complaint. Where Complaints or Appeals relate to a specific timeframe any evidence used should also explicitly support the circumstances alleged in relation to that specific time frame. Complaints or Appeals which remain unsupported by valid and appropriate evidence will not be considered. Students are also asked to emphasise facts when they are detailing points of appeal or grievance and should not engage in unnecessary reference to opinion or emotive argument which cannot be substantiated by evidence. Please ensure that the issues being appealed against are clearly identified as separate points. The first part of the **LASER Student Complaint/Appeal Form** may be used for this purpose.

9. All complaints/appeals will be acknowledged within 10 working days.
10. A LASER investigating officer will conduct an assessment and review of the complaint. Should the complaint not fall within the scope of LASER complaints described in Paragraphs 2 & 3 above, the complainant will be notified within 10 working days of initial receipt.
11. The investigating officer, will seek all relevant documentation and evidence. When the investigating officer is satisfied that all relevant evidence is present, the evidence will be assessed and an initial conclusion reached. The investigating officer will write to the complainant/appellant providing a judgement on each point in the complaint, referenced with relevant evidence. The report will be issued within 20 working days of receipt of the complaint.

Appeals against the outcome

12. If the complainant/appellant is dissatisfied with the outcome s/he may appeal against the outcome to the Chair of the LASER Access and Quality Development Committee (AQDC) at Canterbury Innovation Centre, University Road, Canterbury, CT2 7FG or email a copy of the appeal against the outcome to the LASER Chief Executive Officer within 10 days of receipt of the report. The Chair of the AQDC will respond within 15 working days. The decision of the Chair is final.