

Open-Oxford-Cambridge Doctoral Training Partnership

Complaints and Appeals Procedure

Purpose of this Complaints and Appeals Procedure

1. The Open-Oxford-Cambridge Doctoral Training Partnership (OOC DTP) is a collaborative partnership between the Open University, the University of Oxford, and the University of Cambridge. It disburses AHRC and institutional funds through the award of doctoral DTP studentships, and in support of needs-based training and development for its award-holders. As administrative lead, the University of Oxford administers the AHRC grant monies for this purpose. It is the Doctoral Training Partnership, however, that is responsible for administering the application and award processes for the DTP studentship competition and for the other funds at its disposal.
2. The OOC DTP is committed to operating a fair, efficient and transparent review and selection process for the funding that it offers on a competitive basis, including i) doctoral studentships, ii) grants from the Research Training Support Grant (RTSG), iii) support for placements or high-level skills training from the Engagement Provision, and iv) any extensions to studentship funding.

Applicants to the OOC DTP doctoral studentship competition

3. If you are dissatisfied with the way in which your application for a studentship was handled, this procedure provides guidance on how to raise a complaint and/or appeal a funding decision. It only applies to those whose applications were submitted to the OOC DTP for consortium-level review by one of the three universities within the consortium. If you were not nominated to the consortium-level review process, any appeal or complaint relating to the handling of your application must be directed to the institution through which you applied for funding.
4. Separate procedures exist for appeals or complaints relating to admissions decisions. Please see the graduate admissions complaints and appeals procedures available on the institutional websites of the three universities in the OOC DTP consortium:
 - Open University: <https://help.open.ac.uk/documents/policies/complaints-and-appeals-procedure>
 - University of Oxford: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/applying-to-oxford/university-policies/complaints-and-appeals?wssl=1>
 - University of Cambridge: <https://www.graduate.study.cam.ac.uk/graduate-admissions-appeals-and-complaints>

Current award-holders

5. If you are a current award-holder, and are dissatisfied with: (a) the way in which your application for additional DTP funding has been handled by the OOC DTP, (b) any service offered by the DTP, or (c) the actions or behaviour of a member of DTP staff this procedure provides guidance on how to raise a complaint and/or appeal a funding decision.
6. Appeals and complaints regarding any on-course matters that do not relate to services or the award of funding by OOC DTP or the behaviour of OOC DTP staff acting in that capacity, including issues around supervision, institutional resources and the consideration of interruptions to study and upgrades, must be directed to your home institution.

Definitions

7. This procedure applies to i) applicants to the OOC DTP studentship competition, and ii) current OOC DTP award-holders ('Applicant').
8. An appeal is a formal request for reconsideration of a decision on a funding application or the wording/ terms/ conditions of an offer ('Appeal').
9. Appeals will only be considered on the following grounds:
 - a. **Procedural irregularity**, where an Applicant believes that the DTP has not adhered to its published guidance for awarding DTP funding.
 - b. **Extenuating circumstances**, which, for good reason, were not included in the original application, and which could have been material to the decision-making process. Applicants will need to provide details giving the reasons as to why this information was not disclosed at the time of application.
 - c. **Bias or perception of bias** in the decision-making process. Applicants will need to provide specific examples with supporting documentation to evidence this.
10. A complaint, for the purposes of this process, constitutes an expression of dissatisfaction by the Applicant regarding any service offered by the DTP, or regarding the actions or behaviour of a member of DTP staff ('Complaint').
11. There is no right of appeal or complaint over matters of academic judgement.

General Principles

12. Information about a Complaint or Appeal will only be shared with other parties where disclosure is necessary in order to ensure a fair investigation (e.g. the Applicant's identity will normally be disclosed to a person or body who is the subject of the complaint or whose decision is being appealed).
13. All parties involved in a Complaint or Appeal are required to act reasonably, fairly and courteously towards each other and to respect the DTP's procedures.
14. Anyone involved in a Complaint or Appeal may act through a representative who should normally be a member of one of the universities in the OOC consortium, or a family member (for Applicants), or a trade union officer (for members of staff).
15. Time limits should normally be met by all parties. Time limits may be extended by the relevant decision-maker where it is necessary to do so in order to ensure a fair outcome.
16. Complaints and Appeals that are anonymous or made by third parties will only be considered in exceptional circumstances where there are compelling reasons to do so.
17. The DTP may decline to consider a Complaint or Appeal where the matters in dispute are currently being considered or have been decided by an external body, such as a court or tribunal.
18. If the OOC DTP Director is conflicted, or is otherwise unable to determine the matter, an appropriate substitute will be appointed who will usually be a senior academic at one of the universities in the DTP consortium. The person determining the Complaint or Appeal shall not have any conflict of interest in the matter.

Procedure

Stage 1: Informal resolution

19. Before raising a Complaint or Appeal regarding DTP funding decisions, an Applicant should contact the DTP Manager (manager@oocdtp.ac.uk) and/or DTP Director (director@oocdtp.ac.uk) to explore concerns and, if possible, resolve the matter informally. Applicants should undertake Stage 1 in a timely fashion in order to comply with the timeframes set out under Stage 2.

Stage 2: Formal consideration by the OOC DTP

20. If the Applicant remains dissatisfied and believes that they have grounds for Complaint or Appeal, they should submit a Complaint or Appeal for formal investigation to the OOC DTP Management Board, which will appoint a senior academic from the consortium to oversee the matter.
21. The Applicant should complete an OOC DTP Funding Complaint and Appeal Form and submit it to the DTP Manager (manager@oocdtp.ac.uk) and/or DTP Director (director@oocdtp.ac.uk) as soon as possible, and at the latest within **20 working days** of (a) for Complaints, when the matter the Applicant is complaining about occurred, or (b) for Appeals, the date the Applicant was notified of the relevant funding decision.
22. Applicants will be asked for evidence that they have tried to address the matter informally under Stage 1, and the DTP may decline to consider a Complaint or Appeal if they have not done so.
23. The OOC DTP will acknowledge receipt of an OOC DTP Funding Complaint and Appeal Form within 5 working days.
24. The OOC DTP may decline to consider the Complaint or Appeal if it is trivial or repeats a Complaint or Appeal that has already been made.
25. For all other Complaints or Appeals, the OOC DTP may take any steps that are considered necessary to investigate, including calling on any person to provide specialist assistance. The OOC DTP will usually send details of the matter to anyone who is a subject of the Complaint, or the original decision-maker(s) (for Appeals of funding decisions).
26. An Applicant is able to withdraw their complaint or appeal at any time; the OOC DTP may however decide to continue the investigation if it is appropriate and fair to do so.
27. The OOC DTP will normally complete the investigation, make a decision and send the Applicant a decision letter within **20 working days** of acknowledgement of the Complaint and Appeal Form. If the time limit needs to be extended, the OOC DTP will keep them updated about the progress of the investigation.
28. In the decision letter, the OOC DTP will set out the decision on the Complaint or Appeal, the reasons for the decision and any recommendations.
29. The OOC DTP will also notify the outcome to anyone who is a subject of the Complaint (for funding complaints) or the original decision-maker(s) (for funding Appeals) and any University bodies that need to be made aware of it.

Stage 3: Review of decision

30. If the Applicant remains dissatisfied following formal consideration of the Complaint or Appeal, they may seek a review of the decision by the OOC DTP Strategy Board, which comprises senior members of the partnership's three universities.
31. The Applicant should write to the DTP Manager (manager@oocdtp.ac.uk) and/or DTP Director (director@oocdtp.ac.uk) within **20 working days** of receiving the decision letter following the formal consideration of their Complaint or Appeal under Stage 2 to seek this review.
32. The OOC DTP will acknowledge receipt of a request for review of a decision within 5 working days.
33. The OOC DTP Strategy Board will normally complete a review of the decision and write to the Applicant with its findings within **20 working days** of acknowledgement of the Applicant's request for a review. If the time limit needs to be extended, the OOC DTP will keep them updated about the progress of the review.
34. Following review, the OOC DTP Strategy Board will send the Applicant a decision letter outlining its decision, the reasons for the decision and giving any recommendations.
35. The decision letter is the end of the DTP's procedures and will set out other sources of advice and support available to the applicant where appropriate.