



# **Policy on rescinding awards and academic credit**

**Owned by: Registrar**

**Approved by: Senate on 22nd October 2014**

**Version 1.2 Updated to Reflect Organisational changes August 2017**

## Policy on rescinding awards and academic credit

### 1. Aims & objectives

The aim of this policy is to protect the reputation of Regent's University London (Regent's) and the value of its awards. The policy provides guidance on the rescinding of any award or academic credit that has been conferred by Regent's, in line with the regulations stated in the University's Academic Regulations.

The objective of this policy is to provide guidance on the circumstances which may constitute grounds for the consideration of rescindment, and to provide clear information to staff and students on how such considerations are to be dealt with.

### 2. Guiding Principles

The policy on rescinding awards or academic credit is concerned with protecting the reputation of Regent's and the value of its awards and seeks to ensure that the University has in place appropriate processes for investigating and acting upon allegations made against a student past or present that has been awarded a Regent's award or academic credit.

Senate confers awards upon those students who as evidenced by the Progression and Finalist Board's approval, deem worthy of receiving a Regent's award by having met all approved award requirements. In this regard, the Registrar will approve the conferment lists forwarded from the Progression and Finalist Board, on behalf of Senate who will note them at their next meeting.

The student record should be updated to include a note that states the award conferred and the date, and this should be included on the student's transcript. The names of students receiving awards are also published in the Graduation Ceremony programmes.

Academic credit is awarded at an assessment board and once confirmed is updated on the student record.

On occasion, despite the quality assurance that is taken in all aspects of the assessment process, there may be a need to consider the rescindment of an award or academic credit.

In general this may occur for one of two main reasons as stated in the University's Academic Regulations handbook, being that either:

- i. academic misconduct has taken place
- ii. the original decision for the award was based on misleading or incorrect evidence.

The regulations on rescinding awards or academic credit within the University Academic Regulations are as follows:

*"The Vice Chancellor or his nominee may rescind any Regent's award which has previously been conferred on a student following recommendation from the next available Progression and Finalist Board that it has been established that either academic misconduct has taken place or the original decision of the award was made on misleading or incorrect evidence.*

*A Progression and Finalist Board may rescind academic credit including credit awarded by RPL where new evidence has now come to light concerning academic misconduct or the original evidence presented for the credit is seen to have been falsified, misleading or incorrect. For students who are suspended as a result of academic misconduct and have incorrectly progressed, these students must be required to retake or take those modules which they either passed or were compensated for under false pretences.”*

### **3. Policy statement**

Regent's believes that by providing a process for rescinding an award or academic credit, it will be able to take appropriate action to protect its reputation and the value of its awards, should an allegation against a student or alumni be made, or additional evidence to support a previous allegation come to light after the award or academic credit has been conferred.

### **4. Implementation of this policy**

All staff and students at Regent's are expected to be responsible for implementing this policy. This policy will be available to all staff, students and prospective students.

### **5. Procedure and Process**

#### **5.1 Administrative errors**

The Registry compiles conferment lists following the approval from the Progression and Finalist Boards and sends these to the Registrar for final approval on behalf of Senate. Rarely, administrative errors may be made in producing the conferment lists, e.g. a student may appear on the award list for the same award in more than one instance or a student is recorded on the list having not completed award requirements.

The Registrar will report the error to the Senate Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (SQAEC) outlining the reasons for the error, an action plan to ensure that the error is not repeated, and the remedies to correct the error. Following approval by the SQAEC the Registrar will ensure that the student record is amended appropriately to correct the error. The Registrar will contact the Assistant Registrar for Academic Quality, Assessments and Awards who will notify the student that their record has been corrected.

On very rare occasions an assessment board may approve a student for credit or an award in error, where the student has not met all of the programme requirements, e.g. Study Period Abroad (SPA) or placement hours. Where Regent's is notified by a collaborative partner that credit has been awarded incorrectly or placement hours have been calculated incorrectly then Regent's will investigate and rescind the credit or award if the evidence supports this action. The rescindment of academic credit may result in the reclassification of an award (e.g. from a 2:1 to a 2:2), or a change in the type of the award (e.g. from an M level award to a PGDip).

In all cases where an administrative error has occurred, the student record must be updated immediately upon approval. In cases where an award has been conferred, this information should be made public by way of the Graduation Ceremony documentation as well as being included on the student's transcripts.

## **5.2 Academic misconduct and fraud**

### **5.2.1 Definitions of academic misconduct and fraud**

The University may become aware of circumstances where academic misconduct or fraud has occurred in meeting the award or credit requirements. Academic misconduct is defined in the University Academic Regulations as any act whereby a person may obtain an unpermitted advantage for himself / herself or for another.

This shall apply whether the candidate acts alone or in collusion with others. Any action(s) shall be deemed to fall within this definition whether occurring during, or in relation to, a formal examination, a piece of coursework, or any form of assessment undertaken in pursuit of a qualification. Regent's will also conduct investigations regarding the rescindment of academic credit awarded by RPL where new evidence has come to light concerning academic misconduct or the original evidence presented for the credit is seen to have been falsified, misleading or incorrect.

Academic misconduct includes but is not limited to dishonest practices such as:

- Plagiarism
- Collusion
- Fabrication of data
- Falsification of evidence
- Cheating

Fraud includes but is not limited to:

- Altering transcripts or other official documents relating to student records
- Altering the student record itself
- Misrepresenting one's credentials
- Creating or altering letters of reference

### **5.2.2 Procedure for dealing with cases of academic misconduct or fraud**

#### **5.2.2.a Initial Investigation**

If staff receive information relating to possible academic misconduct or fraud, which may lead to the rescindment of an award or credit, a written statement outlining the allegation should be forwarded to the Registry. At all times the student or alumni will be kept informed of what is happening by the Registry via recorded mail.

Upon receipt of a written statement outlining an allegation of academic misconduct or fraud, the Registry will contact a Dean from a faculty where the student or alumni under suspicion did not study. The Dean will designate a senior member of their faculty staff to conduct an investigation; normally this would be the Associate Dean, who must complete an investigation within three months of the allegation being received or becoming known by the Registry. Once it has been agreed that an investigation will take place, the student will be informed of the following in writing by the Registry by recorded mail:

- That an allegation has been made against them, and what the allegation relates to.
- The date that the allegation was made.
- That an investigation will occur to ascertain the validity of the allegation.
- The date that the investigation will be concluded by.

- The possible decisions that the University may come to and the possible consequences for the student or alumni, particularly if this relates to the rescinding of academic credit for a current student.

If the allegation is rejected following the investigation then all related documentation will be destroyed and this should be made known to the student or alumni at the initial point of contact. If the investigation concludes that there is insufficient evidence to uphold the claim then the claim will be rejected and the student or alumni shall be informed in writing by the Registry by recorded mail.

If there is sufficient evidence to uphold the allegation then the matter should proceed to a hearing, where the investigator shall act as the Prosecutor. At this stage, the student or alumni will be informed of the following in writing by the Registry by recorded mail:

- The outcome of the investigation and that there is sufficient evidence to support the allegation and that the University has decided to proceed the case to a formal hearing.
- The evidence relating to the allegation including all relevant documentation.
- The requirement that the student or alumni must respond to the allegation within 30 days of receipt of the recorded mail and that failure to do so may result in the award or credit being rescinded; and in the case of the latter the steps that the University will now take and the possible consequences to the student.
- In the case of alumni, the option of an informal discussion with the Prosecutor prior to the hearing to try and address the allegation without the need for a hearing.
- The right to provide a written submission regarding the allegation and to appear before the hearing panel.
- The right to be accompanied to the hearing by one person who is not attending in a legal capacity.
- The right of the hearing panel to hear the allegation and evidence in the student or alumni's absence if the student or alumni does not respond within the time allowed and does not request an extension by written application with satisfactory reasons
- In the event that there is a finding of academic misconduct or fraud, the decision of the panel may include the rescinding of the student or alumni's academic credit or award or the reclassification or change in the type of award, and in the case of the former, the panel will follow the academic misconduct procedures outlined in the University's Academic Regulations.

#### **5.2.2.b Post-Investigation Procedures**

##### **5.2.2.b.i Negotiated settlement in the case of final awards only**

The Prosecutor and the alumni (who may be accompanied by a representative who is not acting in a legal capacity) may meet informally and without prejudice to discuss a negotiated settlement. If a negotiated settlement is reached, the resolution shall be set out in writing, signed by the Prosecutor and the alumni, and adopted by the assessment board without debate or voting. A recommendation to rescind an award, reclassify an award, or change the type of an award, shall take effect only after it has been approved by the relevant assessment board. All recommendations should be reported to the Senate Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (SQAEC).

##### **5.2.2.b.ii Hearing panel**

If a negotiated settlement cannot be reached or in the case of academic credit, the Prosecutor shall inform the Registry who will assemble a hearing panel. The hearing will be arranged by the Registry who will appoint a Secretary and form a panel as outlined below to decide the matter.

**Membership of the hearing panel:**

- Chair - Dean of a faculty where the student or alumni did not study
- Senior academic member of staff from a faculty where the student or alumni did not study
- Quality Officer from the Registry
- Secretary – appointed from the Registry

*In attendance:*

- Prosecutor – Dean's designation for investigation
- Student or alumni
- Student or alumni representative\*

\* The student or alumni has the right to be accompanied to the hearing by one person who is not attending in a legal capacity.

If, after hearing the evidence, the panel decides that the evidence does not support the allegation against the student or alumni, all documents related to the case will be destroyed. The student or alumni will be informed that the allegation has been withdrawn and that the matter is closed in writing by the Registry by recorded delivery.

If, after hearing the evidence, the panel finds that the evidence does support the allegation, they will determine one of the following recommendations:

- To rescind the award and may state that the alumni cannot reapply to the University before an appropriate period of time as elapsed. Where a period of restriction on reapplication is placed the Head of Admissions shall be notified and will be responsible for ensuring that the student is not readmitted during that restrictive period.
- To rescind the academic credit and apply the appropriate sanction as noted in the Academic Regulations for academic misconduct. In the case of alumni, this may result in a change in the type of the award (e.g. the rescindment of credit from an M level award may result in the issuing of a PGDip.)
- To reclassify the award.

The student or alumni will be informed in writing by the Registry of the decision of the hearing panel with the reasons specified by recorded mail. The student or alumni will also be informed of their right to appeal against the decision of the hearing panel.

If the student or alumni does not appeal the decision within 10 working days, the Progression and Finalist Board shall accept and adopt the recommendation of the hearing panel without debate or voting. As the remit of the Progression and Finalist Board does not include the power to rescind an award, further consideration of the matter by these bodies shall not be a stage of appeal. However, because the Progression and Finalist Board approved the conferment lists submitted to Senate, they should be informed of the decision of the hearing panel. A recommendation to rescind an award shall take effect only after it has been approved by the SQAEC.

**5.2.2.c Process for appeal**

The student or alumni has 10 working days to appeal against the decision of the hearing panel. The appeal must be made in writing and addressed to the Registrar. The Registrar will review the appeal and decide whether there is any new evidence that has come to light or whether the process for rescindment has not followed due process. The Registrar may either:

- Reject the appeal and inform the student or alumni in writing of his/her decision by recorded mail.
- In the light of new evidence reconvene the hearing panel and inform the student or alumni in writing by recorded mail.
- In cases where due process has not taken place a new hearing panel will be convened and the student or alumni will be informed in writing by recorded mail.

#### **5.2.2.d Current contact information unavailable for alumni**

In the majority of cases, if the Registry is unable to contact the alumni, (i.e. the University is unable to confirm that the alumni received the information), the allegation will be recorded by the Registry and any further proceedings will be held in abeyance. If, at any time, Regent's becomes aware of current contact information for the alumni, the Registry again will attempt to inform the alumni of the allegation and about the procedure for responding to the allegation.

However, in exceptional circumstances where the evidence to support the allegation is clear and overwhelming, or where it is believed to be in the public interest, the University reserves the right to make a decision based on the evidence present and determine an appropriate sanction, without establishing contact with the alumni.

In all cases, in the event that the alumni initiates contact with the University (e.g. to request a copy of a transcript), the Registry shall use the contact information provided by the alumni to inform him or her, by recorded mail, of the allegation and about the procedure for responding to the allegation, or in exceptional circumstances, to inform the alumni that the University has upheld an allegation against them. In cases where the allegation is being addressed, a request for a transcript or diploma supplement will be withheld until such time as the allegation is rejected by the University.

In the event that the alumni receives this correspondence and acknowledges/responds to the allegation, the procedure in Section 5.2.2.b shall be followed.

#### **5.2.2.e Student does not respond**

In the event that the student or alumni receives the correspondence and does not respond within 30 days of the date of the letter, a hearing will be scheduled by the Registry. The student or alumni shall be provided reasonable notice of the hearing date including a statement that if he or she does not attend the hearing, the hearing panel may proceed in the student or alumni's absence and the student or alumni will not be entitled to any further notice in the proceeding.

The hearing shall be conducted following the procedures outlined in Section 5.2.2.b.ii.

### **6. Measurement of policy's success**

Feedback on the success of this policy from students and staff is reported to Senate. The measure of success for this policy will be the University's ability to consider and apply the rescindment of awards or academic credit fairly and consistently.

### **7. Monitoring of the policy**

Monitoring of this policy is conducted throughout the year as part of the University's normal business processes.

### **8. Review of the policy**

Senate will oversee the effectiveness of this policy and recommend the terms of a review where required.

Training in will be made available to staff, particularly members of hearing panels.