



WTC
STUDENT PROTECTION PLAN

AUGUST 2021

WTC Student Protection Plan	
Purpose	To protect the interests of students and enable them to complete their studies in the event of a material change in circumstances.
Enquiries	Enquiries about the SPP should be directed to the Chief Operating Officer (Janey Lawry-White) at operations@wtctheology.org.uk
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Approved by	Board of Trustees
Next Review	October 2022
Staff member responsible for update	Chief Operating Officer

1. Introduction

WTC is a not-for-profit, interdenominational, charismatic theological college with the vision of taking rigorous and accessible Kingdom Theology into the heart of the local church across the UK.¹ Our goal is to equip and empower people of all ages and backgrounds for leadership, mission, and discipleship and, through this, to effect personal and community transformation. We offer part-time, university-accredited qualifications in theology to around 210 students per year.² We work in partnership with local churches who share our vision where our local learning communities (Hubs) are established.

Our courses are delivered via a pioneering blend of in-person teaching, web learning and video-conferencing. All WTC students start the academic year with a five-day, residential, intensive teaching block in September (held at the University of Nottingham), with a second Residential in early January. For a further twenty weeks a year, students study in local Hubs. This model enables our students to study locally around their existing commitments. We welcome students from all church streams, but most of our students are drawn from the independent church sector, which has no dedicated theological colleges. Our students are all based in the UK.

The aim of this Student Protection Plan (SPP) is to set out the actions that WTC will take in the event of a material change in circumstances to protect the student interest and ensure that students can complete their programmes. To do this WTC will work with our validating university to ensure that students are able to achieve the best possible outcomes. The SPP has been designed to comply with the requirements of the Office for Students and should be read in conjunction with WTC's Refunds and Compensation Policy.

WTC seeks to maintain and enhance the quality of the learning experience for all our students. We are committed to ensuring that there are appropriate arrangements in place to protect the quality of the student experience and its continuance in circumstances where these could be adversely affected.

WTC is a values-led organisation. This means that our values guide every aspect of college life and teaching, and this SPP has been formulated in alignment with our values which are on the website: <https://wtctheology.org.uk/about-us/vision-values/>

The Student Protection Plan (SPP) exists to:

¹ WTC is a registered charity (No 1123573) and a company limited by guarantee (Reg No 6506007).

² The University of Chester validates all WTC degrees and qualifications.

- help protect the interests of WTC students
- set out clearly the measures which WTC will take to protect the quality and continuation of study for current and future students in the event of exceptional situations arise, including if their course or WTC were to close
- offer clear and accessible information to current and prospective students on the likelihood of material changes to the courses and programmes WTC offers, or if the college closes, and explain how WTC monitors that likelihood
- outline the actions WTC will take in the event of a material change or closure
- ensure that our actions in assessing risk and in the event of material change or closure are in the student interest
- explain how WTC will inform and consult students should such events occur so that student rights and the responsibilities of WTC are clear
- commit WTC to consult, inform and work with students as early as possible, setting our clear information and options

The [Higher Education and Research Act \(2017\)](#), which requires Higher Education providers to have an SPP, defines significant material changes as those which would affect the quality and/or continuation of a student's studies, including, but not limited to:

- disruption of programme delivery
- the unanticipated departure/unavailability of key members of staff
- the cessation of programme delivery, likely cessation, or change of delivery mode
- major changes in programme content during an academic year
- a decision to close a Hub or Residential location in which WTC's university accredited programmes are delivered
- cessation of partnership with the validating university

The SPP is triggered by material changes (as set out above), particularly those which could affect students' continued participation in their chosen programme of study.³ Should any aspect of the SPP need to be triggered, as far as is under WTC's control, we will take steps to avoid implementing changes during the academic year or making changes close to the start of an academic year.

³ Programmes of study are constructed to enable students to progress through the credit levels and, on achievement of the learning outcomes and credit requirements associated with each stage of the programme, to qualify for a validated award.

The SPP does not apply to minor changes, such as any changes to optional modules being offered within the programme, module options as part of a course offered in different years, or situations covered by staff illness.

The SPP relates to all students studying with WTC. It also identifies arrangements which will be made with our validating university, the University of Chester. It involves any member of staff providing information, advice and guidance to prospective and current students. This includes professional (finance, IT and registry), academic (faculty and study skills tutors) and senior management staff.

In line with our values, WTC is committed to the provision of comprehensive, open and transparent information ensuring accurate, relevant and current procedures are followed enabling students to make informed decisions.

The SPP is available to existing students and staff on our website: www.wtctheology.org.uk and in MyWTC (the student portal). It will be reviewed annually by the Executive Leadership Team and the Board of Trustees.

Applicants will be made aware of the SPP when their place to study is confirmed, and any updates to the plan will be communicated in writing to existing students each year.

2. Risk Analysis and Mitigation

The table below lists possible circumstances which could arise which could undermine WTC's ability to follow through on our commitments (risk), the likelihood of such circumstances happening (level of risk), the measures we have put in place or will put in place to protect student interests (risk mitigation).

For the most part, the time horizon in which these concerns are considered is between three to six years, the maximum length of time an individual student may require to complete a course of study with WTC.

<i>Risks to continuation of study</i>	<i>Risk level</i>	<i>Risk mitigation</i>	<i>Potential severity/ impact on continuation</i>
Institutional Operation			
Decision by the trustees to close WTC	Low	The trustees are committed to WTC's long term calling to serve the church through the provision of rigorous academic theology. Given that WTC's primary constituency is the independent churches who have no dedicated theological colleges, and that these are the fastest growing sector of the UK church, and that student numbers have risen year on year for the past eight years, the future looks very positive.	Low. As above. If this decision were to be made (which is very unlikely) it would be after a number of years of consideration and an exit plan would be put in place to ensure that all existing students were taught out before closure.
Closure of college for financial reasons e.g. significant drop in student numbers and therefore fees	Low	Our strategic and financial plans anticipate an increase in student numbers from the current c. 200 to c. 250 fee paying students over the next 3-5 years based on increasing the number of Hubs to a total of 14. This is based on a steady increase in the number of students for each of the past 9 years, including during the past two, pandemic-affected years; and a steady growth in strong Hubs including two new Hubs opening in September 2021. Income is also received each year from regular individual and trust fund donors (for both unrestricted and restricted funding). Over the past 9 years, our donor funding base has significantly diversified and increased and we have a number of donors (both individual and trust donors) who have committed funding for multiple years. We anticipate that this will continue and are working to that end.	Low. If the decision was made to close the college for financial reasons, this would not be a quick decision, but would have been something the Board were monitoring for a couple of years, and putting in place measures to reduce the impact on existing students. The teaching model means that students are home based and WTC has proved during the pandemic that we can deliver our courses with a high degree of student satisfaction entirely online if necessary.

Unanticipated absence of leadership, registry or operational staff	Low	WTC runs the college highly efficiently with a small staff team. Should one or two staff members be unable to work or resign, the staff team has in place a back-up system by which all the roles can be covered temporarily by other members of staff while a replacement is recruited into the role.	Low. Students should not be aware of staff changeovers or absences.
Withdrawal of conference facilities by the Residential hosting university	Low	We have just signed a five-year agreement with Nottingham University to host our two annual Residential weeks of intensive teaching. We therefore consider that this risk is very low. However, if Nottingham decided to breach their contract, we would find another suitable venue for the two weeks residential teaching of each academic year.	Low. For the reasons set out.
Withdrawal from Hub partnerships by Hub churches	Low	<p>Our Hub churches are our closest partners. Churches partner with WTC because they share WTC's vision to resource their regions with rigorous theological study. Our Hub Agreements include a 24 month notice period for Hub churches who wish to withdraw from the partnership, which provides WTC with sufficient time to identify and establish partnerships with other churches in the region. Several Hubs are partnerships between 2-3 churches. In these cases, where one church withdraws the others will continue to support the Hub.</p> <p>In cases where a single Hub partner finds themselves financially not able to continue in partnership, WTC takes over the running costs of the Hub for a limited period (usually up to 24 months).. This is the current situation with one of our Hub partners. Their income has been significantly reduced as a result of the pandemic. WTC has agreed to support the Hub financially for 24 months. If the partner is in a position to resume their financial support of the Hub, as</p>	Low. In rare cases where a Hub church has withdrawn from the partnership or not been able to continue financially because of a sudden loss of income, and we haven't identified another church to take over the partnership, WTC will step in on a temporary basis and fund the Hub, or find alternative venue for the Hub to meet. We have had experience of dealing with these issues in the past, and always come up with a good solution which means students can continue their courses uninterrupted.

		<p>they wish to, the arrangement will revert to pre-pandemic. If not, WTC will identify another Hub partner.</p> <p>In cases where Hubs have closed because of lack of students which is a mutual decision taken together by WTC and the Hub partner, the notice period of 24 months is in place which means that all current students can finish the level on which they are studying. For those on longer courses, WTC undertakes responsibility for ensuring students can complete their programme of study. Alternatively, if there is another Hub within 1.5 hours travel time, they transfer to the other Hub for the duration of their programme.</p> <p>In cases where there is no Hub within 1.5 hours travel time, Graduate Diploma and MA students could transfer to our Flexi model by which they attend the two Residentials each year, and receive all other teaching online.</p>	
University Validation			
Loss of validation by our validating university	Low	<p>We are currently validated by Chester University. In January 2020, Chester conducted a Periodic Review of WTC, which found that the partnership should be extended for the full five year period.</p> <p>In 2020, the university commenced a Partnership Review with publication of the findings by the 31st August 2021 latest. In the light of this, all partnership agreements were only extended for two years. However, WTC has a commitment from the Deputy Vice Chancellor that, should the review recommend ceasing external partnerships, the university will extend the end date of the current Partnership Agreement (31st July 2021) to allow WTC to make</p>	<p>Low. We have agreed with Chester that, should they wish to withdraw from the partnership, we will negotiate a timeline to enable us to put in place another validating partnership.</p> <p>If WTC does change validating partners, we will ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to minimise disruption to current students, and work to make sure that changes are made in a transitional manner.</p>

		arrangements to partner with another university without detriment to our students. We are currently in conversation with two potential alternative validating universities should this be the case.	
Programme Delivery			
Ceasing or suspension of particular programmes of study	Low	<p>WTC is committed to delivering the programmes and modules which students have enrolled to complete. Any programmes which are being discontinued will affect future students and would not be advertised as programmes of study for applicants.</p> <p>Temporary (1-year) suspension of programmes could occur if there are not sufficient students enrolled on the programme for a particular year, meaning that the pedagogical experience would be of less value to the students. Any students accepted on these courses would be offered places for a subsequent year.</p>	Low/Medium. It would mean that a student may have to wait for one year before commencing their programme of study which might be inconvenient to them.
Discontinuation of particular modules of study	Low	<p>The staff faculty members periodically review the modules contained in particular programmes to ensure that we are offering well rounded, coherent and quality programmes at every level. In these cases, individual modules may be discontinued and others included in the programme to enhance the programme.</p> <p>Changes to modules offered within a programme will only occur at the start of an academic year, and will be advertised on our website: https://wtctheology.org.uk/courses/</p>	Low. These changes would be planned, would not be implemented mid-year and will be advertised to applicants so they are aware of the modules to be included in their programmes of study. So students should not be impacted mid-programme of study.
Temporary discontinuation	Low	The college has access to a range of specialists who could be brought in to cover for a faculty member who is unable to	Low. 50% of the course is delivered online via recorded lectures (those not

of modules due to faculty ill health		<p>teach, meaning that there will be minimal disruption to students on the course.</p> <p>As appropriate if the staff member is unable to teach for a prolonged period and another member of faculty with appropriate skills and experience is not available to cover long term, WTC will move quickly to recruit externally to avoid disruption and cover the gap.</p>	delivered at the twice yearly Residential intensive weeks) and these could be shown as normal, with the virtual tutorials being hosted by another member of staff.
Loss of study skills specialist support	Low	WTC has an outstanding study skills department providing support to all students, and particularly to those with SEN requirements. We expanded the student skills team at the start of last year to two part-time study skills tutors to mitigate against the risk inherent in having one student skills tutor.	Low. In addition to bringing on additional study skills capacity, our staff faculty host Google Hangouts regularly to help students with the technical aspects of essay writing.
Student circumstances			
Students moving their home location	Low	<p>Students who move house can relocate and join another Hub and continue their studies with WTC.</p> <p>If they are moving to an area of the UK which is not within 1.5 hours travel time of another Hub, they can change to become Flexi-students if they are studying for a GradDip or MA. If they are CertHE/BA students the Flexi option is not open but we will find a way to enable them to continue studying to the completion of the programme on which they are currently enrolled.</p>	Low. This is something which happens periodically and which we are used to supporting students through.
Loss of financial support (student loans, DSA, bursary)	Low	A number of students have financial support through student loans, DSA, from trusts and via WTC central bursaries. Some Hubs also establish Hub bursaries. Other students have financial support from family, friends and	Low/medium depending on the individual student's circumstances. Should individual students find themselves in financial trouble

<p>funding) for students</p>		<p>members of their church. Apart from allocation of WTC Central bursaries, other funding support is the responsibility of students to obtain, although WTC and the University of Chester will provide support and advice regarding student loans in England and N Ireland.</p> <p>In terms of WTC bursary funding, we approach trusts and also initiate fundraising projects to raise bursary funding as needed. E.g. In January 2021 we launched a fundraising project to raise money for one of our WTC bursaries and raised £29K for this academic year, and a commitment of £15K for each of the next two academic years. Should the bursary funds need topping up, we will launch further fundraising drives.</p>	<p>mid-course, we encourage them to talk to a member of WTC staff to discuss the situation and discuss options for how they can access additional funding to complete their courses. We have details of trusts the criteria of which might match their circumstances, and we have many student testimonies of ways in which they have accessed funding to complete their courses which we can share.</p>
<p>Students wishing to transfer to another institution</p>	<p>Low</p>	<p>WTC will facilitate this by providing credit/achievement information to the new HE institution. Should the student wish to transfer mid-academic year, they can withdraw from their course in line with our policies for withdrawal, and any balance of tuition fees for the year will be refunded in line with WTC Facts About Fees policy on the website: https://wtctheology.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2021-Facts-about-Fees_01.pdf</p> <p>Acceptance of the student by another institution is entirely the decision of that institution and WTC cannot influence their decision.</p> <p>Students in receipt of student finance will need to notify SFE/SFNI and make arrangements with them to enter a Change of Circumstance request so that funds can be transferred to the receiving institution in line with Student Finance processes.</p>	<p>Low. Processes are in place between HE institutions for students to change between colleges and API qualifications to enable them to continue their course elsewhere.</p>

Legal and Reputational risks			
Former/current students file a formal complaint about WTC	Low	<p>WTC has a number of processes in place to prevent discrimination and provide individual support to students in their studies. These include high-quality admissions procedures, student support procedures, rigorous procedures for student assessment which are in line with those of our validating university, and good staff management. WTC delivers the programmes to students as advertised.</p> <p>Beyond this, WTC is covered by liability insurance in accordance with the University Partnership Agreement with Chester.</p> <p>WTC has a Safeguarding Code of Conduct which all staff, faculty and volunteers agree to adhere to. All Hub churches and the Residential location also have safeguarding policies which are operational while students are studying in person during Residentials and Hub nights.</p>	Low. WTC has a complaints procedure in place which will be followed should a complaint be made. This is available to students, staff and faculty to see.
External circumstances			
National lockdowns due to pandemics	Medium	<p>In the current situation with Covid-19, the government has opened the economy, but the risk of infection continues, meaning that students may not be able to attend one of the Residentials or Hub nights if they are self-isolating. It is our intention and wish to hold our Residential teaching weeks in person. However, WTC will continue to monitor the situation together with the University of Nottingham regarding whether these can be conducted in a Covid-safe manner, and if there is a large rise in cases and the government decides that that we will have another national lockdown, or</p>	Low. WTC moved fully online 1 week before the first government lockdown recognising the risks of meeting together in person from Covid. We have all the processes in place to continue to deliver our courses fully online if that is necessary for periods of the academic year while maintaining the academic standards and our distinctive of 'learning in community'. Given that

		<p>Nottingham decide that they cannot guarantee Covid-safe facilities, we will revert to fully online Residentials and Hub nights, as we have done throughout the 2020-21 academic year, with a high degree of student satisfaction. We can do this with very short notice, given that we have all the processes and equipment in place to do this.</p>	<p>students are home based except for the two Residential weeks per year, the requirement to self-isolate has much less impact on WTC students being able to access learning than were we a fully residential college.</p>
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3. Responsibilities for and Monitoring of Identified Risks

WTC monitors the risks identified above in Exec Team and Board meetings. It is the responsibility of the Principal and Executive Team to consider the consequences of any changes which they may decide to make to programme offerings, university validation, and of the Trustees and Exec Team to monitor institutional and operational risks, legal and reputational risks and monitor external circumstances which may impact students' ability to continue their programmes. Students are responsible for liaising with staff and faculty about circumstances which may affect their ability to continue, and initiate discussions to find a solution which is acceptable to them.

Should any of the risks identified above look likely to materialise, the Executive Team and Trustees will discuss and take actions on reducing the risks, and putting in place appropriate responses.

4. Communication with Students, Staff and Faculty

The SPP is subject to annual review by the Board and Exec. As part of this process they are discussed with staff and with student Hub Representatives representatives from each of our Hubs. The aim is to ensure that risks remain current and mitigations feasible in the light of changing circumstances.

In between these annual reviews, any student can send comments on the SPP to the Chief Operating Officer, either directly by email: operations@wtctheology.org.uk; or via their Hub Student Representative.

The SPP is available to students on the website and on MyWTC (the student portal) and is drawn to the attention of students and applicants. It is included with staff and faculty training and induction activities and documentation.

The SPP and other relevant policies/plans are shared with our validating partner.

5. Communication in the Event of Implementation

Should any element of the SPP need to be implemented because one of the risks has crystallised, WTC will act quickly (ideally within two days of the decision to trigger the change) to let the affected students know, to minimise disruption to their studies.

Depending on the situation, all relevant staff, volunteers, faculty and students will be informed by the appropriate channels (phone, zoom, email, in person with public notices posted on the website). Individual students will be supported and advised by their faculty, relevant staff members and/or their Hub Directors to provide advice, guidance and options.

Where major disruptions cannot be avoided, WTC will ensure that viable alternatives are offered in good time, and students are supported to exercise their statutory rights. All WTC students are also University of Chester students, and the university as well as WTC has an obligation to ensure that students are supported to complete the programmes of study for which they are enrolled.

Should the college need to close, students will be informed as soon as possible, and every effort will be made to continue to the end of the academic year, and ideally to the end of each students' academic programme.

With respect to any programme closure or change mid-academic year (which is highly unlikely), students will be informed as early as possible. If programmes change for incoming students, these will be advertised on courses section of the website: <https://wtctheology.org.uk/courses/>

Students who wish to make a complaint about the way in which the SPP has been implemented can follow WTC's Complaints Procedure (available on MyWTC). Depending on the precise nature of the complaint, students may also have recourse to the complaints procedure at Chester University and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator once all college procedures have been exhausted.

6. Review of Student Protection Plan

The SPP will be reviewed annually by the Board of Trustees in discussion with the Executive Team, following consultation with the Student Representatives on behalf of the student body.

7. Other Relevant Documentation

WTC Refunds and Compensation Policy

Access and Participation Statement

WTC Safeguarding Code of Conduct

WTC Complaints Procedure

WTC Risk Registry (available on request from the Chief Operating Officer: operations@wtctheology.org.uk)