



WTC
STUDENT COMPLAINTS
POLICY

FEBRUARY 2024

WTC Student Complaints Policy	
Purpose	To set out clearly the steps by which students can make a complaint and to clarify for the staff, HDs and Faculty on how any complaint will be dealt with and by whom.
Enquiries	Enquiries about the Complaints Policy should be directed to the Chief Operating Officer (Janey Lawry-White) at operations@wtctheology.org.uk
UKPRN	10030973
Legal Address	16-17 Clarence Parade, Cheltenham, GL50 3PA
Author	Chief Operating Officer
Approved by	Board of Trustees
Next Review	October 2024
Staff member responsible for update	Chief Operating Officer

1. Introduction

WTC has a culture of continuous improvement and we welcome feedback and recommendations by students. It is extremely rare for WTC to receive a formal complaint. At the same time, we recognise that there may be occasions when students are dissatisfied and that there needs to be a process in place to deal with these concerns fairly, transparently, and in a timely way.

Along with every Higher Education Institution, WTC's Student Complaints Policy sets out how we monitor, log and resolve complaints. The WTC Student Contract refers to this policy as part of the terms and conditions of studying. The Student Complaints Policy is available on the website and, for confirmed students, together with all relevant WTC policies, via the Student Portal (MyWTC).

This Student Complaints Policy has been written taking note of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIAHE) ten core principles: accessible, clear, fair, independent, confidential, inclusive, flexible, proportionate, timely and they improve the student experience.

2. What is and isn't a Complaint?

The OIAHE Good Practice Framework for Handling Complaints and Academic Appeals defines a complaint as “an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about the College's action or lack of action, or about a standard of service provided by or on behalf of the College”.¹ A student complaint will usually be about an issue which has directly impacted the person making the complaint.

Complaints include:

- Misleading or incorrect information in prospectuses or on programme description areas of the website
- Concerns about the delivery of a programme, teaching or administration
- Non-fulfilment of obligations including those outlined in the Student Contract

Issues which are not normally complaints include:

- An academic decision about student progression, academic assessment and awards. These would normally be considered under the Academic Appeals process
- General concerns about WTC policies. These are better raised with your Hub Student Rep, or through the regular feedback processes described below.

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<https://www.oiahe.org.uk/resources-and-publications/good-practice-framework/handling-complaints-and-academic-appeals/>

3. Regular Feedback Processes

One of WTC's values is transparency, and we are always interested in listening to student feedback. In line with this, WTC has a number of mechanisms by which comments, positive and negative, can be fed back to the staff team and dealt with as soon as they arise. The primary mechanism is the **Weekly Feedback Form** completed by all Hub Directors (HDs) each week, which is monitored, and the appropriate action taken weekly during term time, by the relevant staff member at WTC; i.e. an IT issue will be acted upon by the Director of IT, issues to do with the Faculty by the Dean of Studies (for undergraduate students) or Vice Principal (for postgraduate students).

Students can also feedback via their HDs, who meet for a **weekly HD telecom** as a team with the Director of Hub Operations (DHO) throughout the academic year. Any complaints or concerns raised in these meetings will be fed back to the respective member of the staff team to take appropriate action by the DHO.

Each Hub has an elected **Student Representative** who will meet formally with the academic and operational staff of WTC twice during the academic year to discuss feedback from the student body. However, Student Reps can approach any member of staff (as can all students) at any time.

An **end of module survey** is sent to all students at the end of each programme module asking for their feedback on the content and delivery of the module, feedback on assignments, associated resources, applicability of the teaching to their work and life situations etc. Results are analysed and are sent to the Faculty member delivering the module, and also to the Vice-Principal and Dean of Studies.

WTC's high value on accessibility means that all members of the staff, including senior staff and Faculty, are available to talk to any student by zoom or phone on request. Students can email to make an appointment with the Principal or other staff members and time will be allocated to these conversations.

4. Complaints procedure

4.1. WTC position

WTC values the views of its students, and aims to manage complaints in a way that is sensitive to each specific case in order to serve our goal of providing an exceptional student experience. The underlying principle of our complaints process is to resolve any issue to the satisfaction of all parties at the lowest appropriate level.

We hope that most issues can be solved through the feedback channels described in clause 3, or by speaking to the appropriate person (clause 4.3). If you are concerned or unhappy about a particular issue, the first step is to talk to the appropriate person (clause 4.3), with the aim of resolving your issue before the

situation has escalated to the point where you consider that a formal complaint is the only way forward.

If you have exhausted the feedback channels and you need to pursue a complaint formally, you can be sure that WTC will treat it seriously and impartially, in line with the process set out in this document. Students who feedback or lodge a complaint are assured that they will not be disadvantaged by doing so.

Complainants normally make their complaints in person in writing. However, you can lodge an anonymous complaint if you wish, but you should be aware that this may limit how the complaint can be investigated and the support provided to the complainant if the investigating body doesn't know who brought the complaint. All complaints, including those made anonymously are treated confidentially as far as possible.

4.2. When can you complain?

WTC students can make a complaint at any time during their studies and up to twelve months after they have finished studying with WTC, unless it concerns a matter which comes under legal jurisdiction, in which case the timeframe for making a complaint is aligned with the legal position under the law of England and Wales.

4.3. Who should you complain to?

Students who wish to make a complaint should, in the first instance, **raise it directly with the appropriate member of staff, Faculty or HD**, at the earliest opportunity. The different routes for complaints on different areas of college life are:

- *Internal Hub complaints* – please address your complaint to your Hub Director.
- *Hub Director complaints* – please address your complaint to the WTC Director of Hub Operations, Kenny Innes, at DHO@wtctheology.org.uk.
- *Faculty complaints* – please address your complaint to the Faculty member themselves in the first place (including any complaints about the module). If you are not satisfied with the response from the Faculty member, please address the complaint to the Dean of Studies (freddy.hedley@wtctheology.org.uk) for undergraduate (UG) programmes, or the Vice-Principal (ben.blackwell@wtctheology.org.uk) for postgraduate (PG) programmes, depending on which course you are studying.
- *WTC Staff complaints* - please address your complaint to the Chief Operating Officer (COO) (operations@wtctheology.org.uk). If your

complaint is about the COO, please address it to the Principal at principal@wtctheology.org.uk.

- In the final analysis, any personal or other complaints not about the Principal, which are unresolved through the previous channels should be addressed to the Principal at principal@wtctheology.org.uk.
- If your complaint is about the Principal, please contact the Chair of the WTC Board. (Contact the COO for the Chair's contact details.)

While it is very rare for complaints not to be resolvable internally, WTC's validating partner universities have processes in place to deal with complaints which cannot be resolved within WTC.

WTC is currently applying for registration with the government Office for Students. Once this registration has been confirmed, WTC students will be able to take their complaints, for areas under their jurisdiction, with the OIAHE: www.oiahe.org.uk/students/can-you-complain-to-us/

4.4. Representation

Students usually make their complaint themselves. There may be cases, however, in which a student is unable or reluctant to make a complaint without support. WTC will not usually accept complaints from third parties unless they are acting as the student's acknowledged representative. WTC will confirm with the complainant that they have asked this person to represent them in these cases.

WTC processes do not have the level of formality which makes legal representation appropriate or helpful.

5. Formal Complaints

5.1. WTC process

Formal, written complaints need to be stated clearly in writing (email or letter) and supported by evidence. Formal complaints will be logged immediately, unless they are of a frivolous nature that has no bearing on the student experience. If resolution to an issue has been attempted informally, and the student is not satisfied with the outcome or proposal, their concern then becomes a *de facto* complaint, and will be logged by WTC in our Complaints Log.

The complaint will be dealt with by the appropriate member of WTC staff or, ultimately the Chair of the Board. (Clause 4.3). The staff member will review the evidence provided to support the complaint, listen to both sides of the issue with the student and other persons involved, and will make an initial response in writing to the complainant within seven calendar days of the written complaint being made.

The staff member who is dealing with the complaint is responsible for pursuing the complaint to a fair resolution which is aligned with WTC policies and processes or those of the validating university. A written record of the process followed, the individuals spoken to, and the decision made and actions taken will be made by the person investigating the complaint. In some cases, more than one staff member who was not involved in the situation about which the complaint has been made may be party to the decision made to ensure fairness and objectivity.

If the solution proposed is not acceptable to the complainant, the issue will be escalated to the Principal of WTC and ultimately the Chair of the WTC Board for action and resolution.

The process taken and any agreements/solutions made will be logged with the complaint in writing, and the records kept for a period of five years after the complaint has been made. It will then be deleted in line with our Data Retention Policy and good GDPR practice.

5.2. Escalating the complaint for external resolution

If a resolution cannot be reached within WTC, the student can escalate it to the University of Chester² or Birmingham Newman University,³ whichever university they are registered with.

Once WTC is registered with the Office for Students, WTC students will have the right to take a complaint which has not been resolved by WTC and the validating university to the OIAHE, if it meets the OIAHE criteria. (The OIA is the independent body set up to review students' complaints.) Information on the areas of complaint which the OIAHE handles, their timeframe for making a complaint, and their review process is available at: www.oiahe.org.uk.

For complaints referred to the OIAHE, WTC will issue a Completion of Procedures (COP) Letter, confirming that WTC has exhausted the Complaints Process channels internally. The COP letter will be issued to the student within 28 days of the end of the internal process. It fixes the date when the student reached the end of WTC's complaint process, states clearly the process by which WTC attempted to resolve the complaint; advises the student that they can take their complaint to an external body; and informs them of the deadline of approaching the OIAHE (within 12 months).

If the OIAHE upholds the complaint, WTC will send the student a written outcome, explaining what will be done to implement any remedy and apologising if appropriate.

² https://www.chester.ac.uk/sites/files/chester/oia_comp_12-0.pdf

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<https://www.newman.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2018/01/Student-Complaints-Procedure-2020-21-approved-by-Senate-1.pdf>

Student Complaints Process Flowchart

