



WIC[®]

Waltham International
College

4.0. Academic Regulations

4.6. Student Complaints Policy and Procedure

Approved

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Version Number

12

Reviewed by

Head of Registry



Glebe House

Version Control

Version	Date	Changes	Reason	Author	Next re-view
1	02/03/16		New Policy	Director of Quality and Curriculum	01/03/17
2	14/12/16	Minor inconsistencies	Checked for inconsistencies	Director of Quality and Curriculum	13/12/2017
3	24/08/17	The complaint process has been simplified and explained in detail and the Principal has been removed from the informal stage.	QAA recommendations to ensure that no single person is involved at more than one stage.	Director of Quality and Curriculum	23/08/2018
4	20/08/18	No Changes	Annual review. The policy will be adjusted in the next period to account for the new structure.	Director of Curriculum and Quality	15/01/2019
5	Sept 18	Changes made to reflect new governance arrangements, the requirement for a Completion Letter for any further appeals and to include aspects of Good Practice from the OIA	Reflection of new governance arrangements	Head of HE	July/Aug 2019
6	Sept 19	Minor changes in grammar	Annual Review	Head of HE	Jul/Aug 2020
7	July 2020.	Replaces Registrar with Student Support Manager Lists, the QAA core practices and requirements and explains how they are met Made changes to ensure procedures are easy to find and navigate, are accessible to all students and apply equally to all students Corrected some numbering errors Updated internal references in line with revisions in policies made in September	Annual Review	Head of HE	Jul/Aug 2021

8	August 2021	Included provision for external complaints.	Annual Review	Head of HE	August 2022
9	June 2022	Changes made to the person/role responsible for keeping and updating the complaint log.	Annual Review	Head of HE	July 2023
10	April 2024	QA review, Updated the title "head of HE" to align with the current organisational structure	QA review	Senior QA Officer	July / August 2024
11	August 2024	Refreshed timelines and clarified process	Annual Review	Quality Lead	Aug 2025
12	September 2025	No Changes	Annual Review	Head of Registry	Sept 2025

External Reference Points

The Complaints Policy provides practical guidelines on how Waltham International College will ensure that all student complaints are dealt with fairly and according to the current expectations relating to providers registered with the Office for Students

It is developed based on the QAA's UK Quality Code for Higher Education Advice and Guidance: Concerns, Complaints and Appeals

As far as possible, this policy references and reflects the good practice guidelines from the Office of Independent Adjudicators.

The policy and procedures of partner awarding organisations are also considered when processing any complaints. Where necessary awarding organisation policies may take precedent over these. Students are informed of the most appropriate channel when considering making a complaint.

Internal References

- Admissions Policy
- Assessment Policy
- Attendance, Retention and Support Policy
- Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedures
- Appeals Policy
- Engagement Policy
- Non-Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedure
- Bullying and Harassment Policy and Procedure
- Fitness to Study Policy and Procedure
- Student Support Strategy (Disability)

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Scope

This policy and procedure relate to services, experience or environment provided by WIC and apply to all students at WIC, current and those who have also completed their course.

(Note that where a student has a complaint about the service or access to resources of a partner awarding organisation, then the relevant policy and process of that organisation may be instigated. Such details can be accessed from the awarding organisation website or VLE site)

External stakeholders can also make recourse to this policy for raising a complaint or make a constructive comment.

Purpose

This document is to ensure that students have a clear procedure to follow when submitting a genuine complaint or constructive comment. It also provides the context and definitions of what constitutes a complaint or comment and how vexatious or malicious complaints will be handled.

Introduction and key principles

WIC treats all comments and complaints seriously, ensuring that they are dealt with promptly, transparently, fairly, consistently and efficiently.

The Complaints Policy is made simple and easy to follow to be accessible to all students and stakeholders:

- This policy is summarised into a simple flowchart on display across college notice boards.
- The policy and procedure are distributed and explained to each student during the Induction and transition processes
- The WIC (and awarding partner) Complaints Policy are available on the College VLE (student access) and WIC website (public access)

The Complaints Policy covers all complaints and comments received, including informal and formal approaches.

Each formal complaint, including a review against the complaint decision should be internally dealt with within 90 days of the initial submission of a complaint.

Complaints with a major effect on the student will be given the highest priority about processing times and access to staff, processes, and stages at a higher level.

Wherever possible, WIC aims to address student concerns about their learning environment and WIC's services timely and informally through open and transparent discussion. Students are encouraged to raise their concerns locally, at an early stage, with

- their lecturer or
- Student Support team
- Registry team
- any other member of staff or
- their student rep

If the comment or complaint cannot be resolved informally, or they relate to an individual in that team then students are encouraged to email at complaints@wic.ac.uk.

Anonymous comments or complaints can be submitted to the **Comments Box** located at campus receptions for informal complaints for similar purposes as above. WIC Caseload Officer regularly collates and reviews these comments, complaints or suggestions leading to assessment, monitoring and potential implementation of enhancement. WIC may not action anonymous comments, but will consider in the light of wider comments received and observed.

Feedback from these complaints is discussed at appropriate board/committee meetings and communicated to Student Representatives who disseminate it to the student body. The Academic Board monitors the caseload and outcomes of complaint activity.

Students, stakeholders and staff have rights and responsibilities under this procedure. Consequently, complainants must make complaints in good faith and without malice.

Complainants who make complaints that are frivolous, malicious, obscene, or abusive may be subject to disciplinary action. All complaints will be confidential and only disclosed to individuals involved in the investigation.

This Policy respects complete independency:

- No person with any potential conflict of interest will be included in any complaint or review process or stage of such process

All complaints are additionally addressed with regards to enhancement procedures:

- the review process should capture any learning gained concerning the general welfare of the students or for the enhancement of all students' experience.

This policy is designed to ensure that:

- the College improves the student experience systematically by learning from its processes, and other bodies' decisions and guidance, sharing this learning where appropriate

- procedures are clear, accessible, inclusive, flexible, and reviewed regularly
- the College explains key terms clearly, describes processes and time limits accurately, covering all types of course and partnership arrangements
- students/ stakeholders raising issues and staff who are subject to complaints are treated fairly, with dignity and respect, and are supported appropriately
- the College considers cases thoroughly but proportionately. The required evidence in support of a case, and the decision, is proportionate
- procedures follow principles of procedural fairness and are applied consistently. Decision-makers are properly trained and resourced and have no conflict of interest in the matter/incident.
- WIC will give clear, detailed reasons for their decisions
- information is released only to those who need it to investigate or respond to the case
- students/ stakeholders are informed if any delays occur

Process on receipt of complaint

All complaints will be considered and acted upon as follows:

- The WIC Caseload officer in collaboration with the Quality Office, maintains a register of all complaints including comments and suggestions. This helps the College to learn from the outcomes of concerns, complaints and reviews to improve the student experience and the learning environment.
- The Complaints logbook and summary of evaluation is presented to the Academic Board for discussion no less than annually.
- Reports of complaint evaluations are presented to the Board of Governors for further discussion, advice and overview. The complaints evaluation report is discussed and signed off by the board of Governors
- Feedback from complaint evaluations are disseminated through the college including the students through the student representatives and staff community. Some key enhancements maybe notified via the VLE.
- The Academic Board also assesses, monitors, and reviews the number, level, type and frequency of complaints and academic appeals made over the course of each academic year, during the Annual Monitoring Review.

Types of complaints considered under this Policy / Procedure:

Examples of grounds for complaint include:

- A failing in WIC academic or student support services
- Inaccurate information about a programme

- Inadequate provision of a programme and/or related resources
- Inadequate facilities or environment
- The conduct of a member of staff.

Students must be registered on a programme to lodge a formal student complaint. The only exception to this is where students have completed their programme and have a complaint about any aspect of certification of their programme (e.g. delays in receiving qualification certificates). Any complaints by external stakeholders will be monitored separately from student complaints.

Exclusions from this Policy / Procedure

The following matters are excluded from this policy/procedure:

- Complaints against the awarding organisation's resources or services
 - See awarding organisation complaints policy on their website
- Complaints against final grades or progress
 - See appeals policy
- Complaints against the admission procedures
 - See admission appeals policy

These are dealt with in other policies and procedures. Please speak to the student support team for any advice or guidance on these other policies and processes.

Complaints procedure

There are three internal parts to the complaint's procedure:

- i) **Informal stage (conciliation)**
- ii) **Formal stage**
- iii) **Review stage**

Informal stage (conciliation) – Local resolution of the complaint:

Complaints are generally best dealt with by the people most closely involved with the issues.

Therefore, students should first discuss the matter either directly with the source of the complaint or with the person responsible for the programme area. This should be in person where possible, however WIC recognises that email and on-line communication may be more suitable.

Where necessary a conciliation meeting may involve a senior member not ordinarily involved in the complaint issue.

WIC expects that most comments and complaints will be clarified and satisfactorily resolved during this stage.

Informal Stage Time-line

The complaint would ordinarily be raised no later than **14 days** after the negative or unacceptable incident.

The member of WIC team receiving the informal complaint should try to resolve the issue through appropriate communication **within 14 days** of the initial receipt.

The complainant should be informed regularly of any delays to this timeframe.

Where the informal stage does not result in a satisfactory resolution or the complainant remains unsatisfied, then the complainant may request an escalation to the **Formal Stage**. This request must be in writing and **within 14 days** of outcome of the informal stage.

Formal stage: making the complaint:

If the claimant is dissatisfied with informal attempts at resolving the complaint, then the case can be escalated in writing using the **Formal Complaint Form** in Appendix 1 and e-mail it to complaints@wic.ac.uk. This must be **within 14 days** of outcome of the informal stage.

The formal stage can be used by a complainant *without* engaging with the informal stage. This must be explained clearly in the **Formal Complaint Form** (Appendix 1) This must be received **within 2 calendar months** of the original negative or unacceptable incident.

All formal complaints and other comments received via the email address are compiled by the Caseload Officer and overseen by the quality office. These are recorded in a Complaints log leading to caseload monitoring and review of issues.

The quality office reviews new cases and considers if an investigation is to be undertaken. An investigation may be assigned to an officer within the relevant area of concern or independent. If the complaint considers harassment by staff, then the case will be considered through an appropriate HR process.

The investigation will generally entail:

- Clarifying all details with the complainant
- Making of relevant and appropriate enquiries, including the collation of evidence
- Obtain written statements from the subject of a complain (where necessary)
- Maintain regular contact with the complainant regarding the progress of the investigation

An investigation report must be completed within **28 days** of the receipt of the Formal Complaint Form, including 3 general outcomes:

1. Dismiss the complaint
2. Complaint is partially upheld – suitable and amicable settlement accepted by all parties
3. Complaint upheld – redress is offered to complainant

The Quality and Development Lead will issue a letter to the complainant with the outcomes of the investigation and details of any redress and ongoing actions.

Where there is no substance to the complaint and that the complaint is considered to be malicious, obscene, or abusive, then the case is dismissed. WIC reserves the right to instigate disciplinary action in line with the College misconduct policy against the complainant.

Where the formal stage does not result in a satisfactory resolution or the complainant remains unsatisfied, then the complainant may request an escalation to the **Review Stage**. This request must be in writing and **within 14 days** of outcome of the formal stage.

Review stage: requesting an appeal

If the claimant is dissatisfied with formal attempts at resolving the complaint, then the case can be escalated in writing using the **Review of Case Form** in Appendix 2 and e-mail it to complaints@wic.ac.uk. This must be **within 14 days** of outcome of the informal stage.

An appeal may be requested based on the following grounds:

- there was a procedural irregularity which has materially disadvantaged the student in making their complaint.
- there is new and relevant material/evidence that was not available at the time the complaint was first submitted.
- there is evidence that the complaint decision or action was unreasonable or impractical.

The Review stage is managed by the college principal who will chair a review panel and invite 2 additional members of staff to be members. No member of the panel will have any involvement with the issue or the previous attempts for resolution at stage 1 or 2.

A review hearing will occur **within 14 days** of receipt of the Review form.

Attendees of the review hearing will be:

- Principal (or nominee)
- 2 independent staff members
- Complainant(s)
- (supportive friend, student representative, or student services/wellbeing officer; legal representation is not appropriate)
- Any witness as deemed necessary

If the complainant (and their supporting individual) is unable to attend the review hearing date, the panel chair may consider:

- Postponing the hearing to another date to enable the complainant to attend
- Continue the hearing with the complainant being absent

The review panel will not re-investigate the case afresh. However, the following may be outcomes of the review panel deliberations:

- confirmation that the complaint has been resolved satisfactorily with appropriate remedial actions
- consider that the recommended remedial actions are
 - impractical
 - overly severe
- inconsistent to other similar cases.
- request the initial investigation to be retaken based on new evidence.

The review panel chair will complete a Completion of Procedure within 28 days

- summarising the original complaint
- clarifies the decision making
- sets the outcome of the review panel
- confirms the date that all internal procedures are completed

The outcome of the appeal is final, and is shared with the complainant and any members of staff directly involved in the complaint.

If the student is still not satisfied with the outcome of the appeal, they can seek recourse through the [Office of Independent Adjudicators \(OIA\)](#). Full details for external recourse will be included in the **Completion of Procedure Letter**.

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) provides an independent, transparent Scheme to review student complaints against individual higher education providers. The OIA only considers cases where the complainant has already exhausted the internal procedures of the institution.

OIA must receive the complaint within 12 months of the date on the completion of Procedures letter.

Timeliness within the process

It is essential that any complaints are submitted and dealt with as soon possible after the unsatisfactory incident, and no later than the timelines set out within this document.

WIC reserves the right to **not consider** a formal complaint or review request if the complainant does not follow the established timelines.

Any delays or deviations from the timelines will be notified to the complainant through regular updates.

Monitoring and reporting

An annual log of complaints and comments are maintained by the Caseload Officer, including those complaints and comments that are received but do not progress to initial stage 2 investigation.

The complaints log is regularly reviewed and a summary report presented to the academic board at least annually.

Data Protection and Confidentiality

By submitting a complaint, students are agreeing that WIC can process, use, and share information it contains to enable the complaint to be considered. Information may be disclosed to any person who has a need to see it for the complaint to be fully investigated. Information may also be shared with relevant people after a complaint to facilitate actions and recommendations after investigation.

All documentation relating to complaints will be kept confidential and shall be disclosed only to those persons who have a right to the information by virtue of their role in the complaints process, or as required by law.

WIC is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office as a Data Controller. Details of the School's registration are published on the Information Commissioners website. WIC as a Data Controller shall implement appropriate technical and organisational measures to ensure that processing of personal information is performed in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR) and under the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA).

For Data Protection purposes and compliance matters, please contact dataprotection@wic.ac.uk.

A record of all complaints is kept for three years, to permit independent scrutiny by any relevant external agency (e.g. OIA, OfS) of our handling of complaints. In addition, on request by authorised external agencies, WIC must provide a written record of all complaints made during any specific period and the action taken as a result of each complaint.

Appendix 1: Sector Guidance Note

The QAA UK Quality Code (2024) sets out twelve principles for assuring quality and standards in higher education. One of these is Principle 12: *Concerns, Complaints and Appeals*.

At present, the most recent detailed Advice and Guidance on Concerns, Complaints and Appeals is the QAA 2018 version, which continues to be applicable.

QAA has confirmed that it will publish updated and more detailed Advice and Guidance for Principle 12 by mid-2026 (Tranche 2 of the new Quality Code Advice and Guidance suite).

Waltham International College will review this policy in line with that publication and update references, processes, and appendices as appropriate to ensure alignment with the latest sector expectations.