



## WYCLIFFE HALL

### Academic Complaints Policy and Procedures

#### Introduction and Principles

1. Wycliffe Hall aims to provide a high standard and quality of service in respect of its academic provision, but recognises that occasionally things do go wrong. As part of its commitment to enhancing the student experience, this procedure has been established to deal with academic complaints from students.
2. For the purpose of these procedures, “student” includes any person studying on an undergraduate course of study supplied by or in connection with Wycliffe Hall, with the exception of students on the SCIO Visiting Student programme, who should follow procedures outlined in the SCIO Programme Handbook, including the regulations therein, Course materials or other course documentation as is from time to time issued. Graduate students’ teaching is normally provided by the University of Oxford, and so complainants should check the [University of Oxford Student Complaints Procedure](#).
3. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about the Hall’s action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the Hall. Complaints are handled differently from academic appeals (requests for reviews of decisions made by an academic body charged with making decisions on student progress, assessment, and awards.<sup>1</sup>
4. The complaints policy has three main stages:
  - a) Informal investigation and resolution
  - b) Formal investigation and resolution
  - c) External review (either by Durham University, if applicable, or by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA))
5. As matters that are dealt with informally at an early stage have the best chance of being resolved effectively, the formal stage of this procedure should only be applied if informal procedures have been exhausted and the complainant remains dissatisfied.
6. It is recognised, however, that there may be occasions when an informal approach is not appropriate. In respect of exceptionally serious complaints, students may write directly to the Principal without having followed the informal or formal stages of this procedure set out below. In such cases the Principal shall decide which stage in the procedure the complaint should be referred to.

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<sup>1</sup> Following the OIA Good Practice Framework

7. In the event of the complaint relating to the Principal they should contact the Chair of the Hall Council. This arrangement is implicit in the remainder of this document.
8. Every reasonable effort will be made to deal promptly and efficiently with all complaints, to investigate them thoroughly, objectively, and independently and to seek to resolve them satisfactorily.
9. All complaints will be dealt with in confidence with the proviso that enquiries will have to be made to investigate the matters that are the subject of the complaint. An individual against whom a complaint is made has the right to be supplied with a copy of the complaint and to comment on it. A complaint cannot be investigated if the student does not wish the substance of the allegation to be made known to the individual concerned.
10. Wycliffe Hall will treat complaints seriously and will deal with them without recrimination. However, where a complaint is shown to be frivolous, vexatious or motivated by malice, it will be dismissed and disciplinary action may be taken against the student.
11. The time limits set out in this procedure will normally be followed. However, where, for good reason, this is not possible, the complainant will be kept informed of progress.
12. At all times, Wycliffe Hall will ensure that staff considering complaints have no actual or perceived conflict of interest, for example by involvement in related complaints or disciplinary matters.
13. Wycliffe Hall will retain records of all complaints, which will be held in accordance with the Hall's Information Security Policy.
14. Where complaints are supported, Wycliffe Hall will use information gathered during the complaints process to improve services for future students.

### **Scope of Procedure**

15. The procedure is designed to encompass academic complaints from students concerning their experience as a Wycliffe Hall student on programmes validated by both the University of Oxford and Durham University.
16. Students on University of Oxford programmes may wish to complain about the University's academic provision. In such cases, [the University of Oxford's Student Complaints Procedure](#) should be followed.
17. 'Academic complaints' can relate to any aspect of the approved academic provision including (but not restricted to) complaints from students concerning their experience of:
  - a) the arrangements for, or delivery of, teaching or assessment for the academic programme;
  - b) the adequacy of supervision for modules that are a formal and assessed part of the academic programme;
  - c) the academic support that is part of the academic programme;
  - d) assessed placements that are a formal part of the academic programme;

- e) administrative or support services that relate to the academic programme;
  - f) information or publicity in relation to the academic programme;
  - g) the infrastructure for academic programmes, including learning resources and teaching spaces.
18. The above is not a definitive or exhaustive list; academic complaints may relate to other areas of academic provision or support where these are perceived to have had a negative impact on the student's academic programme or progress.
  19. This procedure does not extend to '**academic appeals**' (i.e. appeals relating to examinations, assessments, or academic progress, or against expulsion or exclusion on academic grounds). Information on Durham University's approach to academic appeals is available in the *University Calendar, General Regulation VII - Academic Appeals*. Information on the University of Oxford's approach to academic appeals may be found [via the Proctor's Office website](#)..
  20. Equally, the procedure does not cover the following, for which separate procedures exist:
    - a) complaints involving a decision that a student has failed to meet his/her academic commitments (covered by Wycliffe Hall's Academic Discipline Policy, as well as by (as applicable) Durham University's *Academic Progress procedure* or the University of Oxford's *Student Regulations*);
    - b) complaints involving an allegation of misconduct by a student (in addition to college policies, Common Award students should refer to Durham University's *University Calendar, General Regulation IV – Discipline*).
    - c) complaints involving an allegation of harassment (See Wycliffe Hall's Harassment Policy. In addition, Common Award students should refer to Durham University's *Respect at Work and Study policy*).
  21. It is expected that the student concerned will pursue the complaint personally; complaints submitted by a third party will not normally be accepted.
  22. Complaints by a group of students are often of a general nature, and it is usually more appropriate for the students to raise the matter with a student representative in the first instance. Complaints may then be made by a group of students if the relevant representation system has not achieved a satisfactory outcome, or this is not thought to be an appropriate route.

### **Stage 1: Informal investigation and resolution**

23. Most complaints can be resolved informally and, where practicable, a complaint should be dealt with as close as possible to the point at which it arises. A student who wishes to complain should therefore initially discuss the matter with those directly responsible. If the student is unhappy about approaching the person directly responsible, they may seek counsel from their Fellowship Group tutor or another member of the Wycliffe Hall core staff. If that direct approach does not resolve the matter then the student should contact the Academic Dean no more than 20 working days after the event that the complaint concerns unless there is good reason for the delay.

24. Complaints will be acknowledged within five working days.
25. The Academic Dean may decide to deal personally with the informal complaint, or it may be delegated to a member of the Wycliffe Hall staff.
26. The Academic Dean or delegate should if possible have a face-to-face discussion with the student concerned, to come to an understanding of:
  - a) What specifically the concern is about;
  - b) What outcome the student is hoping for, and whether this can be achieved;
  - c) Whether it can be resolved on the spot, for example with an apology or explanation;
  - d) Whether mediation would be helpful.
27. A student should normally expect to receive a full response within fifteen working days of receipt of the complaint.
28. At the conclusion of any informal resolution attempts, the student will be informed of the formal complaint procedure (Stage 2). The substance of the complaint and the conclusion of informal stage of the procedure will be recorded in writing, and this record will be shared with the student.

#### **Stage 2: Formal investigation and resolution**

29. The formal stage is triggered when:
  - a) the student declines to engage with the informal stage; or
  - b) the student remains dissatisfied after the informal stage; or
  - c) the issues raised are sufficiently complex or serious to warrant a formal investigation. Examples of such cases include, but are not limited to, threats of serious harm; any complaint relating to disability support; or repeated service failures.
30. Formal complaints should be addressed in writing to the Principal, and must arrive within 20 working days of the conclusion of the informal process.
31. The information to be included in the complaint by the student is as follows:
  - a) details of the complaint;
  - b) a statement of the action already taken to try and resolve the complaint informally and why the response given is considered unsatisfactory;
  - c) any supporting information or evidence;
  - d) the form of resolution or redress sought.
32. Wycliffe Hall will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days.
33. The Principal may decide to deal personally with the formal complaint, or it may be delegated to a member of the Wycliffe Hall staff who has had no previous involvement in the matter.
34. The Principal or delegate will seek resolution of the complaint by a means appropriate to its nature and circumstance. Such means may include:

- a) further investigation of the substance of the complaint;
  - b) correspondence between the parties;
  - c) negotiation with the student or with appropriate members of staff or with both;
  - d) facilitation of a conciliation meeting between the student and student/staff concerned;
  - e) facilitation of a mediation meeting between the student and student/staff concerned.
35. If the Principal or delegate decides to investigate the complaint via correspondence, the student bringing forward the complaint will be sent a copy of any comments obtained during this process and will be invited to submit a response prior to a decision being reached.
36. In very exceptional circumstances (for example, in particularly complex cases, or those involving disciplinary issues), provisions may be made for hearings:
- a) The Principal or delegate may appoint a Committee, which shall consist of three members: the Principal or delegate (who will chair), one member of the Hall Council, and one member of the Wycliffe Hall tutorial staff. Staff sitting on the Committee must not have had any prior involvement in the process at any earlier stage.
  - b) In the event of the Committee being divided in its decision, the Chair will have the deciding vote.
  - c) The Chair will appoint a Clerk to the Committee to support the Committee by collating evidence, preparing documentation, making necessary arrangements for the hearing, taking notes of the proceeding and ensuring that relevant Policies and Procedures are followed correctly.
  - d) The Clerk to the Committee may request that documentary evidence be submitted for the attention of the Committee at least 3 full working days in advance of the hearing. Typical examples of such documentation may include, but are not restricted to, medical certificates and written witness statements. The student will be entitled to see all statements and documents seen by the Committee.
  - e) The student and any other relevant parties will receive written notification of the hearing and the Committee membership at least ten working days before its scheduled date.
  - f) The student involved may attend the Committee either in person or remotely (e.g. via Skype).
  - g) The student may be accompanied at the hearing by a fellow student or a member of staff acting as a 'Supporter'. It should be noted that this is not an adversarial proceeding and the Supporter should not at any time become directly involved in the delivery of evidence or in the Committee's discussions. The Supporter will not have any role in the decision-making of the panel.
  - h) A note of the meeting, detailing attendance, a brief outline of proceedings, and the decisions taken, should be made.
37. Stage 2 should normally be completed, and a written response sent to the student, within 60 workingdays of the formal complaint being received.

38. The possible outcomes from the Stage 2 process include:
  - a) a resolution, reached in co-operation with the student, following conciliation or mediation if appropriate;
  - b) if the complaint is upheld, a recommendation will be made outlining how the issue(s) identified in the complaint should be addressed including, if applicable, appropriate redress to the student;
  - c) dismissal of the complaint.
39. Wycliffe Hall will issue a completion of procedures letter, detailing the outcome and informing the student of their right to request a review of the complaint by either Durham University or the Office of the Independent Adjudicator as applicable (i.e. Stage 3 of the process).
40. A copy of the letter to the student informing them of the outcome of their complaint will be retained in accordance with Wycliffe Hall's Information Security Policy.

### **Stage 3: Review for students on University of Oxford programmes**

39. If Stages 1-3 have been completed and the student remains dissatisfied with the outcome, the student may complain to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) within 12 months of the issue of a completion of procedures letter by Wycliffe Hall.
40. Information about the OIA and the procedure for submitting complaints can be obtained from the OIA website: [www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk)

### **Stage 3: Review for students on Durham University programmes**

41. If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2, and believes that the complaint has been handled improperly or unfairly according to this policy, the student may request that the complaint is reviewed by Durham University.
42. The student can request a review by writing to Durham University no later than 10 working days after the date of the Stage 2 response.
43. The student must provide the following information:
  - a) details of the complaint (including relevant correspondence from Stages 1 and 2, and any further new supporting documentation);
  - b) details of why the student remains dissatisfied;
  - c) details of the form of resolution or redress sought.
44. Receipt of the request for a review will be acknowledged by the University within five working days. This acknowledgement will advise students that they may seek advice from the Durham Students' Union (DSU) throughout the Stage 3 process.
45. The University will determine whether to review the complaint to ascertain whether Wycliffe Hall's policy and processes had been implemented correctly.
46. The possible outcomes include:

- a) if procedural irregularities are identified: the complaint will normally be referred back to Wycliffe Hall for re-investigation;
  - b) if the complaint is deemed to be outside the parameters of an ‘academic complaint’ (as defined above): the complaint will be referred back to Wycliffe Hall for investigation as a complaint that is outwith the Common Awards provision;
  - c) if Wycliffe Hall’s policies and processes had been implemented correctly: the complaint normally will be dismissed, the reasons for dismissal will be provided to the student in writing, and a completion of procedures letter will be issued.
47. The student will be notified of the University’s decision within 28 days of the University’s receipt of the request for a review.
48. If the University dismisses the review request there shall be no further opportunity for the complaint to be pursued within the University.
49. The University’s formal response at the completion of Stage 3 will advise the student that they can refer their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator within 12 months of the issue of a completion of procedures letter by Durham University.
50. Information about the OIA and the procedure for submitting complaints can be obtained from Durham University’s Academic Support Office, the Durham Students' Union website, or from the OIA website: [www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk).

<b>VERSION CONTROL</b>					
<b>Version Number</b>	<b>Policy Gatekeeper</b>	<b>Date of Approval</b>	<b>Committee</b>	<b>Date to Take Effect</b>	<b>Date of Next Review</b>
<b>V.5</b>	<b>JER</b>	<b>24.11.14</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>24.11.14</b>	<b>Michaelmas 2015</b>
V 6	KAR	09.11.16	Education	09.11.16	Michaelmas 2017
v 7	KAR	2.11.18	Education	2.11.18	Michaelmas 2019
V12	HLS	3.11.21	Education	n/a – no changes	Michaelmas 2023

It is the responsibility of the Gatekeeper of each policy to check annually whether there have been any legislative and/or University policy changes that are relevant to Wycliffe Hall.