

Student Grievance Policy and Procedure

1. Who the policy applies to

1.1 This policy and procedure applies to all students of Westminster College, whether or not sent by the United Reformed Church.

1.2 *(It should be noted that the Cambridge Theological Federation (CTF) has its own Complaints Procedure which should be used in relation to Federation staff or supervisors outside Westminster. Attention is also drawn to the policies on student grievances and complaints prepared by the universities whose degrees Westminster students may be enrolled upon. The Principal (or in his/her absence the Vice Principal) in consultation with Westminster and/or CTF teaching and award administration staff will identify if a CTF or university policy should be a route for dealing with a grievance, or if the matter should be handled through this Westminster Student Grievance Policy and Procedure).*

2. Why the policy is needed

Westminster College recognises the need for good practice and natural justice when resolving student complaints. If a student has a complaint or grievance about any aspect of College life, it should be raised with an appropriate person at the earliest opportunity, as complaints that are dealt with informally at an early stage have the best chance of being resolved effectively. This includes complaints relating to supervision or teaching, which should not be raised for the first time at a formal examination appeal. The College will make every effort to deal with complaints sympathetically.

3. The policy principles

3.1 The aim of this Grievance Policy and Procedure is to settle complaints fairly, swiftly and as near as possible to the source of the grievance. However, it is hoped that most issues will be resolved informally and it is in the interest of both the College and the student raising the grievance, to reach a solution to a problem. Grievances will be investigated fairly and impartially respecting the confidentiality of information that is provided during the course of any proceedings.

3.2 It is preferable that where a student has a grievance, in the first instance, the matter should be settled informally with the person(s) involved.

3.3 A representative of the student body may offer support to member students of the student body who are encountering difficulties and the Senior Student(s) can raise issues which affect a number of students at one of their regular meetings with the Principal.

3.4 Details of local URC ministers with experience of Westminster, who are available for pastoral support from outside the College are available on request to the Principal (or in his/her absence) the Vice-Principal. S/he would not normally be involved in any formal grievance procedure, but would remain outside such procedures in order to offer pastoral support.

3.5 The student has the right to be accompanied by a fellow student or other individual offering pastoral support. Such pastoral support could be offered by a Trade Union representative if the student belongs to a Trade Union.

3.6 This Grievance Policy must be activated within three months of a matter being brought to the attention of the relevant person (Convenor of Governors, Principal/Vice Principal, personal tutor). This time limit only relates to this Westminster Student Grievance Policy; the practice for other relevant university and denominational policies may differ.

4. The definition of terms used in the document

Governors' Grievance Panel:

The panel established by the Board of Governors of Westminster College to hear a specific student grievance against a prior decision with regard to a grievance.

5. How the policy will be applied

The Grievance Procedure

5.1 The Informal Procedure

A student who feels aggrieved by any matter relating to his or her course, theological education and formation, or any pastoral or practical matters associated with the College, should raise it informally in the first instance with the appropriate member of staff. This will usually be the student's personal tutor. If a student has a grievance against any member of the Westminster teaching staff s/he should speak first with the Principal. If a student has a grievance against a placement supervisor s/he should speak first with his or her tutor. Complaints may also be channelled through the Senior Student(s). Problems relating to accommodation should first be addressed through the Tutorial Office. If the student feels that the matter has not been satisfactorily dealt with within seven days, the student should raise it with the Principal (or with the Convenor of Governors if the complaint is in relation to the Principal).

5.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be respected, as far as the law permits. The person to whom a complaint is made should make clear to a student making a complaint if it is going to be necessary for the matter not to remain confidential. The student will be informed and given the reasons why. Students should also understand that in some circumstances a demand for confidentiality may make it difficult for the College to assist with their grievance.

5.3 The Formal Procedure

- 5.3.1 Where informal procedures have failed to resolve the problem, a student may bring a complaint or grievance to the Governors. A letter setting out details of the complaint should be addressed to the Clerk of the Governors. The Clerk may ask a student bringing a grievance to set out in writing further details, making clear the exact nature of the complaint.
- 5.3.2 On receipt of a formal complaint the Governors will normally take preliminary advice from the Principal (except in cases where the Principal might be the subject of the complaint) and, where appropriate, may then appoint a Panel to consider the issues in detail. The Governors are likely to establish a panel where they believe that there is substance to the grievance and where informal procedures have been exhausted or are inadequate. The Panel hearing the grievance will normally consist of three members of the Board of Governors, one of whom will act as Chair. The members of the Panel should not have been involved in the process about which the complaint is being made. The Clerk to the Governors normally serves to administer and clerk the process.

5.4 Examination Appeals

Students are referred to the appropriate university regulations governing the examinations for which they are entered to ascertain the grounds of any appeal relating to an examination result. They are strongly urged to consult with their tutor and the College Director of Studies before lodging any formal appeal.

5.5 Detailed Procedure of a Governors' Grievance Panel

- 5.5.1 The procedure of a Governors' grievance Panel will be as informal as possible, consistent with a proper consideration of the issues. The Clerk of the Board of Governors will act as

clerk to the panel and may be contacted by the student bringing the grievance for information and advice on procedures.

- 5.5.2 The responsibility for presenting witness statements or for calling witnesses to attend will lie with the person making the complaint and those responding to a complaint. Requests for additional material may arise when the initial documentation has been received and either party should have the right to submit further documents that may not have been available when the initial documentation was prepared. Both the student and anyone who is the focus of the grievance will be entitled to see all statements and documents seen by the Panel at least 48 hours before the Panel meets.
- 5.5.3 The student is entitled to be present at hearings of the Panel and to be accompanied by a friend or representative, who may speak at the invitation of the Chair of the Panel. If a complaint is being made against a particular person he or she is also entitled to attend hearings, see documents and to be accompanied by a friend or representative, who may speak at the invitation of the Chair of the Panel.
- 5.5.4 The questioning, either by the complainant or by anyone from the College, should be limited to one hour (this period not to include questions raised by members of the Panel).
- 5.5.5 The order of any hearing will be at the discretion of the Chair of the Panel. The Panel may ask questions of anyone present. The student will be given a full opportunity to state his or her case, as will any against whom a complaint has been made. The clerk to the Panel will keep a careful record of the Panel's discussion, as well as a clear record of any decision.
- 5.5.6 The findings of the Panel will be communicated verbally to the student concerned and to anyone who is the subject of the grievance, as soon as possible. They will in all cases be communicated in writing as soon as possible after the conclusion of the meeting. A record of the discussion will be agreed by the members of the Panel within 48 hours.
- 5.5.7 The decision of the Governors' Grievance Panel will be final.

6. Responsibility for administering and updating the policy

The Principal is responsible for updating this policy in consultation with the Convenor of the Board of Studies and seeking advice from United Reformed Church Human Resources Department as necessary

7. When it was last revised, when it will next be revised

August 2024
August 2027

8. The date from which it applies

May 2014

9. Statutory regulations and good practice guidance

The College is bound by the United Reformed Church's policies on equal opportunities and sexual harassment. The College will take steps to protect staff and students from harassment, bullying or victimisation. Further good practice is identified in the College's Equal Opportunities and Diversity Statement and Commitment.

