



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF
WELLINGTON
TE HERENGA WAKA

STUDENT FORMAL COMPLAINTS

PUBLIC FACING ANNUAL REPORT 2024

Te Herenga Waka—
Victoria University of Wellington

May 2025



The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the formal complaints the University received in 2024, as required by the Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners) Code of Practice 2021. This data also is to identify areas of concern and opportunities for growth and development.

This report is made publicly available to support transparency and openness regarding the University's complaints procedures. 2024 is the second year of such a report being published, moving forward these reports will support a broader understanding of potential trends and opportunities for change.

DEFINITION OF A FORMAL COMPLAINT:

1. Are accepted under a formal complaints process, either within the University or to an external agency (this does not include informal or alternative resolution processes).
 - a. For the purposes of this report, a 'formal complaint process' is defined as any complaints against the university which follow either a formal staff conduct process (as per the staff conduct statute) or are complaints that cannot be initially resolved with the service manager and are escalated to SICR, a Director or a member of the Senior Leadership Team for resolution (or Accommodation Services central unit for Halls based complaints).¹
2. Must relate to the Pastoral Care Code.
3. Must be against the institution (including complaints about staff), this does not include complaints against students.
4. Must be significant and material.

This definition was informed by guidance from NZQA to support tertiary institutions uphold the obligations of the Pastoral Care Code and VUWSA has been consulted in the development of this definition.

It is important to note that some students may raise a concern as a 'formal complaint', however when it is successfully resolved through informal/alternative resolution processes at the University, it is not considered as a part of this definition.

OVERVIEW OF TE HERENGA WAKA FORMAL COMPLAINTS PROCESS

Students can find information about the complaints process and support options from a specific section of the SICR section of the University's website.

In most cases, complaints relating to issues concerning students will be referred to the SICR team. Complaints by students that relate to the University, its systems or its staff, will be referred to the operational area's manager that is most appropriate. Students can also make a complaint to the manager of a service directly.

The university aims to take a restorative approach to all its complaints and will endeavor to work with the student to resolve the matter at the lowest level possible.

If students are unsatisfied with the outcome of their complaint, it can then be escalated to the relevant Director or Senior Leadership Team member for review.

If students are not satisfied with this outcome, students can raise their concern with the relevant external agency. For most complaints relating to the pastoral care code, 'Study Complaints' is the most appropriate service.



¹ Currently, the university does not have a centralised method to report on any complaints that are addressed and resolved by Deans. These are often academic concerns and if they are not resolved, they are escalated to an 'Academic Grievance', which is a formal university process and is recorded in the table below.

ROLE OF THE STUDENT INTEREST AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION | TAURIA TEAM

Once a complaint from a student has been received, it will be reviewed by the SICR team. The person who receives the complaint will action it in line with the regulations or procedures it relates to.

They will consider the following things:

- whether there are risks or safety concerns that need addressing to make sure everyone involved is safe.
- what the student's support (including cultural support) needs might be, how they have been impacted, and how to work alongside the student to ensure the University can minimise the impact of the situation on their wellbeing, studies and other areas of their life.
- the most appropriate person or operational area of the University to refer the complaint to for any further action.

Once investigated, the outcome will be communicated to the student and any other relevant parties who have been involved (subject to the University's privacy obligations).



FORMAL COMPLAINTS 2024

	Internal University Formal Complaint Processes				
Complaint type	Total	Upheld/Partly upheld	Not upheld	Unresolved	Other (such as staff member resigned or complaint withdrawn)
Staff conduct ²	17	3	6	2	6
Provision of service	-	-	-	-	-
Academic Issue	-	-	-	-	-

	External to the University Formal Complaint Processes			
Complaint type	Upheld/ partly upheld	Dismissed	Withdrawn	Still under investigation
Staff conduct ²	-	-	-	-
Provision of service	1	-	-	-
Academic Issue	-	-	-	1

² Some of these complaints may include multiple complaints about the same staff member

ANALYSIS OF 2024 NUMBERS

This data shows that the prominent area of complaints from 2024 are in the staff conduct space. These complaint processes can often be difficult for students as there are several employment law obligations and requirements which govern these processes and specify what information can be shared with students. Another challenge in this space is that students can often have unrealistic expectations around timing, outcomes and natural justice requirements and so the SICR team plays an important role in ensuring that students are well informed of all the procedural obligations and privacy implications before students engage in a formal complaint process against a staff.

AREAS OF PRIORITY FOR 2025

Student Facing Resources and Communications:

In 2025, the University plans to improve website content so that it is simplified, more accessible to learners from diverse backgrounds and easier to navigate. This also includes creating some printed resources for students which explain the reporting process and answer frequently asked questions students often have.

Restorative options for Academic Grievances

The current Academic Grievance process (the University's avenue for any formal complaints of an academic nature) is currently a lengthy process and complex process that is often difficult for both staff and students to go through. A focus for 2025 will be exploring what alternative and restorative resolution options may be possible so that early resolution of academic complaints can be more easily achieved and better meet the needs of all parties.

Centralised data collection and data informed analysis of student concerns

After the launch of a bespoke case management system for the SICR team, the University now has enhanced capability to identify trends related to student concerns/complaints. A focus for 2025 will be using this aggregated data to identify areas of priority and opportunities for growth relating to student complaints.

As highlighted above, the University lacks a central way to record and report on any complaints that are addressed at the Deans level and this will be an area of priority so accurate data from across the institution is represented in these reports moving forward.