

Complaints

Context

Settle District U3A Complaints Policy

In any organisation, complaints will occur from time to time and it is important that members know where to turn for help, advice and support, so that whatever the issue, it can be dealt with quickly, objectively and appropriately. This policy sets out the ways in which Settle District U3A (sdu3a) will endeavour to deal with such complaints in a way that is quick, effective and fair to all involved.

Procedure

In the first instance, complaints should be directed towards the Committee of the Settle District U3A (sdu3a). This may include complaints from members about an issue that has arisen or complaints from an external organisation or individual. Depending on the nature and source of the complaint, the Committee will make a decision as to how best to approach reaching a resolution.

In dealing with complaints the Committee will ensure:

- All actions are documented.
- Complaints are dealt with quickly and fairly.
- Every effort is made to try and de-escalate the situation and settle issues without having to resort to formal action, where possible.
- Confidentiality will be maintained. For more serious complaints the Committee may need to liaise with and share information with the Third Age Trust. This will not constitute a data

breach due to Settle District U3A's (sdu3a) membership of and affiliation with the Trust.

- Decisions made will be based on the facts and evidence gathered.

Informal process

In most cases, it is hoped that complaints can be dealt with informally as detailed below:

1. The Groups' Co-ordinator or designated Trustee will first attempt informal resolution, by

holding an informal discussion with each party concerned. The purpose of this would be to understand the problem and hear each party's views. The parties may decide to put their concerns or complaints in writing, and for the sake of clarity this is often helpful.

2. The Groups' Co-ordinator or designated Trustee will seek to summarise the situation with both parties, be clear about any required changes to ensure it does not happen again and clear the air.

3. If the Groups' Coordinator or designated Trustee feel that there is a case to answer but that nevertheless it is a minor issue, then it should be made clear to the relevant parties that there must be no repeat of the sort of actions/behaviour which led to this problem. If that outcome is accepted by both parties, then no further action is necessary.

Formal process

If the Groups' Coordinator or designated Trustee feels that the situation warrants a more formal approach or a specific course of action e.g. exclusion from an interest group, or if the person raising the complaint wishes to lodge a formal complaint, the Groups' Coordinator or Trustee will refer the matter, in writing, to the Chair of the Settle District U3A (sdu3a) Committee stating that this is a formal complaint. This will include a summary of the complaint, any steps already taken to deal with the issue and any action that the parties involved consider necessary to resolve it.

1. The Committee will appoint a Trustee who acts as the designated Trustee for managing the complaint. The Committee may also contact the Third Age Trust and request support from the Regional Trustee, a Trust volunteer and/or National Office staff. The Committee will inform the complainant that additional support has been requested and the reasons why.

2. The member will be asked to put the complaint in writing giving specific dates and times – where possible.
3. A letter or email will be sent to the complainant confirming receipt of the complaint and If the complaint is deemed to be a grievance the letter should confirm that the grievance policy will be followed. if the complaint is deemed to be a disciplinary then the disciplinary procedure will be followed.

If the complaint is deemed to not involve a grievance or disciplinary matter then the following process will be undertaken.

1. The Chair will appoint an investigating Trustee to gather information relating to the complaint. This will include the letter of complaint and any supporting documentation or other member statements. The result of these investigations must not be disclosed to any other Trustees at this stage, in order to not bias any appeal.

2. The Chair will appoint a subcommittee of three committee members to hear the complaint. The timetable for the date of the meeting to hear the complaint will be short, within 14 days

3. The subcommittee will then consider the matter, taking into account any mitigating circumstances and agree what action to take, this could include, for example, a change of procedures, a change of venue for monthly meetings or whatever outcome is deemed the most appropriate as a solution.

Decision

The subcommittee decision will be communicated in writing to both the

member or Trustee who raised the complaint and the member or Trustee against who the complaint has been made. Both parties will be informed as to the outcome of the investigation in respect of whether the complaint has been upheld or not upheld. If the complaint has been upheld, the letter will also specify what action will be taken as a result.

Right of appeal

A right of appeal should be offered providing it is lodged within a 7 day period from the date of the subcommittee decision being provided to the complainant and the member or Trustee against whom the complaint has been made. The appeal

needs to be lodged in the form of a written representation for the Committee to consider. An appeal can be lodged either by the person who made the complaint or by the person against whom the complaint has been made. The appeal can include a request for a right of reply as well as written representations.

1. For the appeal, the Chair will convene a meeting of three Trustees (including him/herself). This should not include those who were involved in the in the initial investigation.
2. The person raising the appeal will be offered a verbal right of reply, if s/he wishes to take this up then s/he will be asked to attend a meeting with the appeal panel. Where the verbal right of reply involves the member or Trustee against whom the complaint has been made, s/he will be offered the option to attend with a companion who may also speak in a personal capacity.
3. The whole issue will be summarised and the person making the appeal will be given the opportunity to speak. The appeal panel will review the decision based only on the facts

included in the original hearing, taking into account any mitigating circumstances, and then make a

final decision, which must be communicated in writing to both parties.

Availability and changes to this policy

This policy and any appendices will be reviewed annually by the Committee. It is available on the Settle District U3A (sdu3a) website or by contacting a Committee member. This policy may change from time to time. Members will be informed via the newsletter and/or the monthly meetings when any material changes are made to Settle District U3A's (sdu3a) policies and procedures. Members should contact any member of the Committee if they have any queries about this policy,

**need it in an alternative format,
or have any complaints about the
policy and its implementation.**

Date of next review

November 2024