

# Complaints/Grievances/Problems Policy



In any organisation, there will be problems, grievances and complaints 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 and objectively and appropriately.

It is in everyone's interest that

- Problems, grievances and complaints are dealt with quickly and fairly
- Every effort is made to settle the issue without having to resort to formal action
- Confidentiality is maintained by all concerned

You should always try to sort out any problem by talking and resolving it informally and amicably with the person/people involved if possible, but if this fails then please refer to the following procedures.

## **PROBLEMS FOR A GROUP LEADER WITHIN AN INTEREST GROUP**

Problems that can arise within a group include

- Disruptive and/or unsociable behaviour
- Poor attendance/timekeeping
- Unsuitability
- Failure to pay fees
- Disagreement between members

In most cases, the Group Leader should be able to sort it out by talking to the member/members in question and resolve it informally and amicably. If this fails and the problem persists the Group Leader should refer the matter to the Group Activities Coordinator on the Committee.

The Group Leader should not allow a situation to continue which impacts on other members of the group.

The Group Leader does not have authority to exclude a member from the group permanently. That decision must be made by the Committee. Should a Group Leader refuse to have a member in the group without the approval of the Committee, it will not be possible for that group to continue with that Group Leader running it. However, the Group Leader may suspend a member pending investigation of the complaint.

## **PROBLEMS WITH THE GROUP LEADER**

Initially the member/members should try to resolve the problem by discussing it with the Group Leader. However, if this is unsuccessful or if the member/members involved feel unable to do so, they should refer the matter to the Group Activities Coordinator.

## **PROBLEMS WITHIN THE U3A AS A WHOLE**

- Member to member
- Member and the Committee
- Member and an individual Trustee/Committee member
- A member who brings the U3A into disrepute or acts in a way, which is prejudicial to the U3A
- A member who causes damage to property and/or equipment through misuse/negligence, etc.
- Complaint received concerning any member or the U3A as a whole

The above will all be referred to the Secretary in the first instance unless the Secretary is personally involved, in which case it should be referred to the Chairman.

## **PROCEDURE WHEN A COMPLAINT IS RECEIVED OR PROBLEM/GRIEVANCE IS REFERRED**

The Group Activities Coordinator or the Secretary will endeavour to

- Establish the facts quickly, consulting as many people as possible;
- Have an informal discussion with all concerned to summarise the problem, hear everybody's views and clear the air.
- If they consider there is a case to answer but that it is a relatively minor issue, they will make it clear to all present that there must be no repeat of the sort of actions/behaviour that led to this problem
- If they consider that the situation warrants a more formal approach or a particular course of action e.g. exclusion from an interest group (including those involving events/outings, e.g. Fine Dining, Local History, etc.), they should refer the matter formally to the Committee.

## **FORMAL PROCESS**

- The Secretary will appoint a group of at least three Trustees (including at least one officer but not the Chair) to consider the issue.
- This group of Trustees will hold meetings (which will be minuted) with all relevant people including the Group Activities Coordinator and/or the Secretary (whoever has dealt with the matter informally).
- Everyone will be invited to state their case, preferably verbally but if this is not possible or convenient the group of trustees will accept written statements.
- The group of Trustees will then agree a course of action, having taken into account any mitigating circumstances.
- The process will be concluded within 28 days or exceptionally the persons concerned will be notified within that time to explain the delay and advise a revised timescale.

## **POSSIBLE FORMS OF ACTION**

- Level 1 – a verbal warning about future conduct by an elected officer with another Trustee present, which will be confirmed in writing
- Level 2 – a written warning which clearly states what will happen if the situation is repeated
- Level 3 – a final written warning
- Level 4 – exclusion from an interest group
- Level 5 – termination of U3A membership

Ideally we will be able to sort out most problems either through an informal chat or through Levels 1 or 2. However, in the case of an extremely serious proven misdemeanour, e.g.

- sexual/racial abuse, discrimination, harassment, bullying
- dangerous or violent behaviour
- falsification of expense claims
- theft
- malicious damage
- conduct which brings the U3A into disrepute or is prejudicial to the U3A or the running of the U3A

the Committee has the right to move immediately to Level 3, 4 or 5

## **RIGHT OF APPEAL**

Before a member is excluded from an interest group or has his/her membership terminated, a right of appeal should be offered and in the case of expulsion from the U3A, must be offered. An appeal, providing it is lodged within a seven-day period, can take the form of written representation for the Committee to consider or a request for a right of reply. If it is the latter, a meeting of the whole Committee should be called and the member in question should be asked to attend and can be accompanied by a friend who may also speak in a personal capacity. The whole issue should be summarised and then the member given the opportunity to speak, along with the supporter if so desired. In both cases, the Committee will review the decision, taking into account any mitigating circumstances, and then make a final decision, which must be communicated in writing.

The decision will be communicated within 21 days of receipt of appeal. When this is not possible the persons concerned will be advised of reasons for delay and a revised timescale.

If it proves impossible to solve the problem at local level then the matter will be referred to National Office for advice.

*Adopted by the Committee on 27 April 2017*

*Reviewed in March 2023*

*For review March 2024*