

Bishop's Stortford University of the Third Age (B/S U3A).

Complaints Policy

B/S U3A views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right for the person who has made the complaint.

B/S U3A's policy is:

- To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for any member who wishes to make a complaint.
- To publicise the existence of its complaints procedure so that members know how to make a complaint.
- To ensure that B/S U3A group co-ordinators and/or executive committee members, know what to do if a complaint is received.
- To ensure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way.
- To ensure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired.
- To gather information which helps B/S U3A to improve its practices.

Definition of a complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by a member, about any aspect of B/S U3A which has not been resolved by discussion with a group co-ordinator or executive committee member.

Confidentiality

All complaint information will be handled sensitively; only those who need to know will be informed and information will be treated according to any relevant data protection requirements.

Responsibility

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with B/S U3A executive committee.

Review

This policy will be reviewed regularly and updated as required.

Procedure

In the event of a complaint the procedures described below will be used.

Monitoring and learning from complaints

Complaints will be reviewed as necessary to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action.

Guidelines in respect of verbal complaints

The person who receives a verbal complaint should observe the following principles:

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation.
- Listen - allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words. Sometimes a person just wants to "let off steam" .
- Don't debate the facts in the first instance, especially if the person is angry.
- Show an interest in what is being said.
- Obtain details about the complaint before any personal details.
- Ask for clarification wherever necessary.

- Show that you have understood the complaint by reflecting back what you have noted down.
- Acknowledge the person's feelings (even if you feel that they are being unreasonable) - you can do this without making a comment on the complaint itself or making any admission of fault on behalf of the organisation e.g. "I understand that this situation is frustrating for you".
- Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issue.
- Don't promise things you can't deliver.
- Make sure that the person understands what they have been told.
- Wherever appropriate, inform the person about the available avenues of review or appeal.
- Take the complainant's name, address and telephone number.
- Tell the complainant that B/S U3A has a complaints procedure.
- Tell the complainant what will happen next and how long it will take.
- Where appropriate, **ask the complainant to send a written account by post or by email** so that the complaint is recorded in the complainant's own words.

Resolving complaints

Stage One

In many cases, a complaint is best resolved by the person being complained about. If the complaint has been received by that person, they may be able to resolve it swiftly and should do so if possible and appropriate. If it is not appropriate for that person to take responsibility for dealing with the complaint it should **be handled by an executive committee member selected by the chairman**. In all cases the person handling the complaint should consult any B/S U3A executive committee member who may have an interest in the issues raised by the complaint. Whether or not the complaint has been resolved, the complaint information should **be passed to B/S U3A chairman within a week**. If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond. Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within a week. The acknowledgment should say who is dealing with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply. A copy of this complaints procedure should be attached. Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within four weeks. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given. Whether the complaint is justified or not, **the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken** to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

Stage Two

If the complainant feels that the problem **has not been satisfactorily resolved at stage one**, they can request that the complaint be reviewed by B/S U3A committee. At this stage, the complaint will be passed to B/S U3A secretary. The **request for review by B/S U3A executive committee should be acknowledged within a week of receiving it**. The acknowledgement should say when the complainant can expect a reply. The secretary may investigate the facts of the case or, where appropriate, ask another officer to do so (providing this does not create a conflict of interest). If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed that it is to be dealt with by the executive committee and given a further opportunity to respond. The **person who dealt with the original complaint at stage one** should be kept informed of what is happening. Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within four weeks of the request. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given. Whether the complaint is upheld or not, **the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken** to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint. The decision taken at this stage is final.

Approved by the B/S U3A executive committee July 2017