

Crediton U3A Complaints Procedure

Introduction

Complaints may be from individual members but may also come from external organisations or non-members. All complaints must be passed, in the first instance, to the committee. Committee members can be contacted by email via the Crediton u3a website. Depending on the nature and source of the complaint, the committee will decide as to how best to approach reaching a resolution.

Role of the Committee

In dealing with complaints, the U3A committee will ensure:

- All actions will be documented.
- Complaints will be dealt with quickly and fairly.
- 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 the U3A's membership of and affiliation to the Trust.
- Decisions made will be based on the facts and evidence gathered.
- Where possible, the U3A committee will try to de-escalate the situation and settle issues without having to resort to formal action.

The informal process

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

- A suitable committee member (the mediator) will be selected to investigate the complaint.
- If the complaint is about two members of a group, the Groups' Coordinator could be supported by the group leader.
- For issues involving committee members another committee member should attempt to mediate.
- As a first step, the mediator should check that the complainant would be happy with an informal process.
- Next, the mediator should talk to all parties involved to document and understand the issue.
- The mediator will then develop and propose a mutually satisfactory outcome.
- The proposal should include the statement that any unsatisfactory actions/behaviour will not occur again and that no further action is necessary.
- If the proposal is satisfactory to all parties, no further action is necessary.
- If the mediator feels the situation warrants a more formal approach or a specific course of action e.g. exclusion from an interest group; or if the interested parties cannot agree, the matter should be referred, in writing, to the Chair of the U3A Committee stating that this is a formal complaint.
- The written formal complaint should detail all aspects of the complaint and why it has to be taken to the next level.

The formal process

A formal complaint should be made in writing, giving as much detail as possible, including dates and times. The complainant should also state what their desired outcome would be, although this outcome cannot be guaranteed. On receiving the complaint, the committee should:

- The committee will appoint a Trustee (committee member) 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.
- 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 procedure 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 Chair will appoint either one or two people to lead on the investigation.
- The investigation will include gathering information and conducting interviews related to the complaint.
- The person(s) against whom the complaint has been made will be informed about the basis of 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, so as not to bias any appeal.
- 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.
- The subcommittee will then consider the matter, taking into account any mitigating circumstances and agree what action to take.
- The decision will be communicated in writing to both the complainant and any other member involved.
- If the complaint has been upheld, the letter will also specify what action will be taken as a result.
- A right of appeal should be offered providing it is lodged within a 7-day period from the date of the decision being provided to all parties. 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 complainant or by the person against whom the complaint has been made and can include a request for a right of reply as well as written representations.
- 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 initial investigation.
- 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.
- 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.