

Seaford u3a
Code of Conduct and Complaints Procedure
(Amended March 2023)

Code of Conduct

Members of a u3a are expected to know, follow and promote the guiding principles of the u3a movement and to conduct themselves in line with these principles at all times.

They are also expected to treat each other with dignity and respect, and specifically:

- Members must always act in the best interests of Seaford u3a and the u3a movement. They must strive to uphold its reputation and never do anything which could bring their own u3a, another u3a or the larger u3a movement into disrepute or expose it to undue risk.
- Members are expected to use the resources of Seaford u3a responsibly and only in the furtherance of its stated charitable objects and purposes.
- Members are expected to reflect the current organisational policy of Seaford u3a, regardless of whether it conflicts with their personal views. This includes restricting group membership to u3a members, although non-members are allowed to attend for one or two taster sessions.
- Members are expected to abide by Seaford u3a's procedures and practices, whatever activity they are engaged in.
- Members are expected to treat each other with dignity and respect at all times.

Complaints Procedure

A complaint may arise from within or without a u3a. It may include a complaint from one or more members about an internal issue or a complaint 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 reach a resolution.

Complaints and responsibilities of the Committee

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. In the first instance, complaints should be directed towards the Committee of the u3a.

In dealing with complaints, the Committee will ensure:

- that all actions are documented;
- that complaints will be dealt with quickly and fairly;
- that the Committee will try to de-escalate the situation and settle issues without, where possible, having to resort to formal action;
- that 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];
- and that decisions made will be based on the information gathered and only on that information.

The informal process

It is hoped that in most cases complaints can be dealt with informally.

Depending on the issue, a decision should be taken about the best person to lead efforts to attempt to resolve the situation informally. If an issue has arisen between two members in a group then the group leader may be the best person, supported by the Groups' Coordinator if felt appropriate. For issues involving Committee members it may be best for another Committee member to attempt to mediate and try to find a solution. At this initial stage it is necessary to check with the complainant whether he or she is willing to accept an informal outcome rather than proceeding to a formal process.

The person or persons identified to lead on this informal stage will hold an informal discussion with all the relevant parties. The purpose of this is to understand the problem and to hear each party's views. The complainant may at this stage decide to put his or her concerns or complaints in writing. This is often helpful as a record.

If there are several people involved it may be deemed appropriate to speak with all those who have been involved or mentioned so that as full a picture as possible is obtained.

The purpose of these informal meetings will be to seek to summarise the situation with both parties and attempt to reach a mutually satisfactory outcome; to agree any changes required to ensure that the situation does not arise again; and to clear the air.

If it is felt that there is a case to answer but that it is nevertheless a minor issue and that all parties are willing to accept the agreed outcome, it should be made clear that there shall be no repeat of the actions or behaviour and that no further action is necessary.

If, however, it is felt by the person or persons initiating the informal stage that the situation warrants a more formal approach or a specific course of action (e.g. exclusion from an interest group) or if the complainant wishes to lodge a formal complaint, he or she should then refer the matter, in writing, to the Chair of the Committee stating that this is a formal complaint. This letter 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.

The formal process

Where someone wishes to raise a formal complaint, he or she will be asked to put the complaint in writing, providing as much information as is relevant and, where possible, giving specific dates and times. The complainant should also be asked as to what outcome he or she hoping to achieve; for example, whether an apology would be acceptable. It should be explained to the complainant that whilst his or her desired outcome forms part of the complaint, he or she needs to be aware that there are no guarantees as to what the eventual outcome will be.

The Committee will appoint a Trustee to act as the designated Trustee to manage the complaint process. 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 explaining that

- if the complaint is deemed to be a grievance the letter should confirm that the grievance procedure will be followed; or
- if the complaint is deemed to be a disciplinary matter the disciplinary procedure will be followed; or
- if the complaint is deemed to not involve a grievance or a disciplinary matter the procedure described below will be followed.

The Chair will appoint one or two people to lead an investigation. This will include gathering information and conducting interviews related to the complaint. The person or persons against whom the complaint has been made will be informed of the basis of the complaint. This will include the original letter of complaint and any supporting information. In order not to bias any appeal the result of these investigations must not be disclosed to any other Trustees at this stage.

An initial meeting to hear the complaint will take place within 14 days of the formal complaint being received by the Chair. The Chair will appoint a Committee comprising the Chair him or herself and two other Trustees to hear the complaint.

The Subcommittee will consider the matter, taking into account any mitigating circumstances, and will agree appropriate action. (Examples might be a change of procedures, a change of venue for groups or meetings, a change of group leader, or whatever other outcome is deemed most appropriate.)

The decision

The Subcommittee decision will be communicated in writing to both the complainant and the member against whom the complaint has been made. Both parties will be informed of the outcome of the investigation, giving reasons where relevant and appropriate. If the complaint has been upheld, the letter will also specify what action will be taken as a result.

The right of appeal

For an appeal to be considered it must be lodged within seven days of the decision of the Subcommittee being communicated to the parties. The appeal needs to be in writing and can be lodged by either party.

The Chair will convene an Appeal Panel comprising the Chair him or herself and two other Trustees. The Panel should not include any individual who was involved in the initial investigation.

The appellant will be offered a verbal right of reply. If the appellant wishes to accept this offer he or she will be invited to attend a meeting of the Appeal Panel. The appellant will be offered the option of being accompanied by a companion who may also speak in a personal capacity.

The Chair will summarise the situation and the appellant will be invited 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 will make a final decision. This must be communicated in writing to both parties within seven days of the Appeal Panel.

If the appellant does not wish to attend and speak, the Appeal Panel will come to a decision based on all the available information. This decision will be communicated to both parties within seven days of the decision being made.

If the complainant is not satisfied with this decision, he or she may escalate the complaint to either a grievance or a disciplinary matter. The relevant policies are available as separate documents.

Adopted by Seaford u3a Committee on 9 March 2020

Signed (Chair)

chris ste 9.03.20

Review of the above undertaken three years from the above date:

On: 13 March 2023

Signed:



Name: Les Fothergill

Committee role: Chair