



(Additionally fulfils the requirements of “Disciplinary and Grievances”).

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Code of Conduct – Guidance for Stroud u3a Members

All our members are expected to.....

- a) Participate in our activities in a respectful, inclusive and positive way at all times.
- b) Be honest and ethical in all dealings within or on behalf of Stroud u3a, its members and other organisations.
- c) Show respect, courtesy and consideration to everyone with whom you deal within Stroud u3a, related organisations and the general public in relation to U3A activities.
- d) Be punctual and reliable in attending meetings, events or other commitments and, wherever possible, letting the tutor, group leader or organiser know of non-attendances, longer absences, withdrawals from groups, events, or volunteer commitments.
- e) Observe strict confidentiality regarding organisational and members' personal information to which you may have access and never disclosing contact details of any Stroud u3a member, tutor or Group Leader to anyone without their express permission.
- f) Avoid all forms of discriminatory behaviour in regard to nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, culture, religion, age and mental or physical disability.
- g) Not engage in behaviour that is unlawful, inappropriate, disruptive or intimidating.
- h) Not engage in any form of gambling in Stroud u3a.
- i) Ensure that any consumption of alcohol is moderate, appropriate and does not adversely impair yourself or harm, hinder or annoy others nor risk damage to the positive reputation of Stroud u3a.
- j) Preserve the wellbeing and safety of members and others by:
 - I. Participating safely in each group or activity and abiding by any reasonable directive or prerequisite specified by the tutor or event organiser for that participation (for example, the use of safety equipment).
 - II. Refraining from activities or comments that promote a personal business, product or cause, or that might place others in a vulnerable situation either financially, physically or psychologically.
 - III. Not causing any wilful damage to Stroud u3a equipment, materials, facilities, or those of other venues or suppliers we use.
- k) Present Stroud u3a in a positive way, refraining from harming the organisation's reputation or relationships.
- l) Pay fees or other monies due in a timely manner and, at least, within timescales set in our Constitution.
- m) Abide by this and all other Stroud u3a policies and procedures from time to time in place, the Stroud u3a Constitution and the objects and principles of the Third Age Trust.
- n) If concerned or feeling aggrieved about anything about Stroud u3a to follow the following Complaints process so that we can address any and all of your concerns.

1. Scope

The scope of this document includes concerns, complaints or grievances from members about an issue that has arisen. It also covers Complaints from external organisations or individuals.

2. Approach and Strategy

In any organisation, problems 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 Stroud u3a. 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 fair and timely resolution.

In dealing with Complaints, the u3a Committee will ensure that:

- All actions and decisions are documented.
- Complaints are dealt with quickly and fairly and neutrally.
- Stroud u3a Committee will always first try to de-escalate the situation and settle issues without having to resort to formal action.
- 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 although only the minimum necessary information will be shared.
- Decisions made will be based on the facts and evidence gathered.
- This Policy is adhered to and copies are provided to all interested parties at the start of any Compliant Handling process.
- Any person who is the subject of a Compliant may not be involved in the investigation or judgement about a Complaint. Therefore, for example, where it states that the Chair will act in this policy, the Vice-Chair would need to do so if the Complaint were to be against the Chair. Remember, that the Trustees are all exact equals in terms of their several and collective responsibilities.
- Where possible meetings will be conducted face to face although the use of video conferencing (e.g. by Zoom or similar) can be used if agreed in advance by all parties to any specific meeting.
- Neither meetings, nor video calls should be recorded by any party. And any recordings which are made contrary to this will not be admissible.

3. Informal Responses

Stroud u3a hopes and expects that Complaints of all kinds will be rarities and it encourages all its members to conduct their activities in such a manner as to carefully and at all times to consider the needs of others. However, we must recognise that Complaints may yet arise. In the vast majority of cases though, it is hoped that any Complaint can be dealt with rapidly and informally as detailed below.

Depending on what the issue is, a decision should be taken as to who the best person is to lead on attempting to resolve the situation informally. If an issue has arisen between two members in an activity group, then the Group Coordinator may be the best person supported by the Groups' Secretary, 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. The initial stage requires checking with the party raising the concern as to whether they are willing to accept an informal outcome as opposed to going through a formal process. The person identified to lead on the Complaint at this stage does not need to be a Trustee.

The person(s) identified to lead on the informal stage should hold an informal discussion with all relevant parties. The purpose of this would be to understand the problem and hear each party's views. The parties may decide to put their concerns in writing, and for the sake of clarity, this is often helpful. The person looking into the complaint will record at least a summary of each discussion that takes place (including date and time).

If there are several people involved with the Complaint – it may be deemed appropriate to speak with others mentioned so that as full a picture as possible is obtained.

The purpose of informal meetings is to seek to understand and summarise the situation from all perspectives, attempting to reach a mutually satisfactory outcome, agree any changes required to ensure that the situation does not happen again and to clear the air. Care should be taken when deciding how to schedule meetings and discussions as to whether these are separate, group or one to one meetings. In addition, it is best practice for two persons to carry out these discussions so that there is always at least three persons present in any meeting. Furthermore, if any party wishes to be accompanied for moral support then that should be facilitated where possible.

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

If, however, it is felt by the person(s) leading on 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 person raising the Complaint wishes to lodge a formal Complaint, the matter should be referred, in writing, to the Chair of the Stroud u3a Committee stating that this is now a formal Complaint.

4. Formal Complaints

Where someone wishes to raise a formal Complaint, they will be asked to put the Complaint in writing providing as much information as is relevant and giving specific dates and times – where possible. The Complainant should also be asked to include what outcome(s) they are hoping to achieve by making the Complaint, for example, whether they would be prepared to accept an apology. Explain to the Complainant that whilst their desired outcome forms part of their Complaint, they need to be aware that there are no guarantees as to what the likely outcome will be.

A letter or email will be sent to the complainant acknowledging receipt of the Complaint enclosing a copy of this policy.

The Committee will appoint a Trustee to act as the designated Trustee for managing each specific Complaint. This must be a Trustee who is not the subject of the Complaint and also one who has not hitherto been involved in trying to resolve the Complaint. The Committee may also contact the Third Age Trust and request support from, for example, the Regional Trustee, a Trust volunteer and/or u3a Office staff. Independence and neutrality in the investigation and Complaint handling process is paramount. The Committee will inform the Complainant that additional support has been requested and the reasons why. Especially, where the Committee is small then it may be necessary to seek support from the u3a Trust, the Cotswold Link and/or nearby u3a Committees to be able to complete this process with adequate resources and neutrality. These factors may delay things somewhat and the Complainant (and any other directly affected persons) should be kept informed.

The Chair will appoint either one or two people to lead on the investigation. This 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, in order not to bias any appeal.

The Chair will appoint a Panel of no less than THREE persons who can be impartial to hear the Complaint. Ideally, these will all be Committee members, but the Chair must bear in mind the totality of the Committee and the possibility of a subsequent Appeal. Also, this Panel cannot include the Trustee(s) who has/have investigated the Complaint who will need to participate to present their findings.

The timetable for the date of the meeting to hear the Complaint will be short, ideally within 14 days of the acknowledgement of the Complaint. The Panel will consider the matter, listening to and taking account of any mitigating circumstances. They will then agree their decision and what action to take. Ideally a decision will be unanimous, but a 2/1 majority decision will be acceptable. Who voted which way will not be recorded and will be confidential. Action 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.

5. Decision

The Panel decision will be communicated in writing to both the person who raised the Complaint and, if it is a person, then the person against whom 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. All parties will be offered a Right of Appeal in these letters. To be valid, any appeal must be lodged within 10 calendar days of the receipt of the decision letters.

6. Right of Appeal

A right of appeal should be offered providing it is lodged within a 7-day period from the date of the Panel 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 Panel 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. If an appeal is lodged by either party, then all parties will be informed and advised of their options as regards the appeal process.

The appeal can include a request for a right of reply as well as written representations. For the appeal, the Chair will convene a meeting of no less than THREE persons who can be impartial to hear the appeal. Ideally, these will all be Committee members, but the Chair must consider other options if there are insufficient “untainted” Committee members. Also, this meeting cannot include the Trustee(s) who has/have investigated the Complaint who will need to participate to present their findings.

The person raising the appeal will be offered a verbal right of reply, if they wish to take this up then they 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, they 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 final opportunity to speak. The appeal panel will then review the original decision based only on the facts included in the original hearing, taking account of any mitigating circumstances, and then make a final decision, which must be communicated in writing to both parties. The Appeal panel decision is final and there will be no further Right of Appeal.

It is to be stressed that the appeal is not an opportunity to rerun the previous hearing nor may “new evidence” be introduced. The appeal meeting is to consider whether or not the previous hearing considered matters appropriately and acted properly (i.e. in line with this Policy) in coming to their original decision.

The decision of the appeal meeting may be either to UPHOLD or to OVERTURN the original decision. If the latter, the appeal meeting Chair must explain in writing the exact ground(s) for this decision and also what consequences will follow. For example, what redress might be appropriate.

Important Note: Some u3as also have a Disciplinary Procedure but as Stroud u3a is wholly run by unpaid volunteers, it is not considered that a formal Disciplinary Procedure is appropriate. Also, Stroud u3a does not have a separate formal Grievance Procedure – the expectation being that this Complaints Policy will suffice for all types of Complaints and/or Grievances raised.