

Complaints Policy and Processes

Introduction

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. Complaints may arise from individual members or interest groups or complaints from an external organisation or an individual.

First Steps

In the first instance, complaints should be directed towards the Chair of Oban u3a Committee, or any member of the Committee, who will alert the Chair.

Depending on the nature and source of the complaint, the u3a Committee will make a decision as to how best to approach reaching a resolution and where necessary seek advice from the Third Age Trust (national u3a).

In dealing with complaints Oban u3a Committee will ensure:

- All actions will be documented
- Complaints will be dealt with quickly and fairly
- In all cases the party raising the concern should be asked if they are willing to accept an informal outcome as opposed to going through a formal process
- Decisions made will be based on the facts and evidence gathered

Procedures

Oban u3a Committee will try to settle issues without having to resort to formal action, where possible.

If an issue has arisen concerning members in a group, if that cannot be resolved within the group, the Groups Co-ordinators may be able to resolve the matter.

Should an issue involve a Committee member, another Committee member may be asked to help find a solution by mediation. Confidentiality will be maintained. For more serious complaints, Oban u3a Committee members may need to liaise with and share information with the Third Age Trust. This will not

constitute a data breach due to Oban u3a's membership of and affiliation with the Trust.

If a complaint is from an external organisation or an individual, an agreed representative of Oban u3a Committee should attempt to resolve the situation informally. The person designated to handle an informal resolution will hold an informal discussion with all the people in each party concerned, to better understand the problem and hear each party's views.

The parties may decide to put their concerns or complaints in writing for the sake of clarity and may involve a friend in any discussion.

The designated Committee member will seek to summarise the subject of the complaint with both parties, be clear about any changes necessary to ensure the matter is resolved and should not recur.

If that outcome is accepted by both parties, then no further action is necessary.

If it is felt that the situation warrants a more formal approach or a specific course of action e.g. exclusion from an interest group or membership of Oban u3a, or if an external organisation or individual raising the complaint wishes to lodge a formal complaint, the matter should be referred, in writing, to the Chair of Oban u3a Committee stating that this is a formal complaint. This 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.

In the case of an issue remaining unresolved by the informal procedure or of a formal complaint, Oban U3A Chair may contact the Third Age Trust and request support and advice from the Regional Trustee, a Trust volunteer and/or National Office staff. Oban u3a Secretary will inform the complainant if additional support has been requested and the reasons why it has.

A letter or email will be sent to the complainant confirming receipt of the complaint and inviting the complainant to put their own summary of the complaint in writing giving specific dates and times, where possible. The complainant should also be asked what outcome they are hoping to achieve by making the complaint, for example, whether they would be prepared to accept an apology. The letter or email to the complainant should

explain 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.

The Chair of Oban u3a will appoint a sub-committee of three members who have not been involved in the issues to hear the complaint. The sub-committee will gather information and conduct interviews relating to the complaint, and the individual or individuals against whom the complaint is made will be informed of the basis of the formal complaint. This will include the letter of complaint and any supporting documentation or other statements. The result of these investigations must not be disclosed to any of the u3a Committee not involved in the process at this stage, in order to not compromise any appeal.

The sub-committee shall arrange a formal hearing of the complaint by setting out a timetable for the date of the meeting to hear the complaint. The timetable will be produced within 14 days. Both the complainant and the individual or individuals against whom the complaint is made shall have the right to present their case with the help of a friend or representative if so desired.

The sub-committee will then consider the matter, taking into account any mitigating circumstances and agree what action to take. This could include, for example, a change of procedures, a change of venue for a meeting or whatever outcome is deemed the most appropriate as a solution.

Decision

The sub-committee decision will be communicated in writing to both the complainant and the individual or individuals against whom the complaint is made. If the complaint has been upheld, the letter will also specify what action will be taken as a result. Possible decisions will fall into one of five levels which should be recorded as part of the documentation of the formal process:

Level 1 – a verbal warning about future conduct by a member of the sub-committee

Level 2 – a written warning which clearly states what will happen if the situation is repeated

Level 3 – a final written warning of more serious action if the situation is repeated

Level 4 – exclusion from an interest group

Level 5 – termination of U3A membership

Right of appeal

A right of appeal should be offered to the complainant, and the individual or individuals against whom the complaint is made, providing it is lodged within a 7-day period from the date of the subcommittee decision being provided to them. The appeal to be lodged in the form of a written representation for the whole Oban u3a Committee to consider.

For the appeal, Oban u3a Chair will convene an appeal meeting of the Oban u3 Committee (quorate) and summarise the issue of the appeal. The person making the appeal will be given the opportunity to speak and a member of the formal complaint subcommittee may exercise a right of reply. The appeal meeting 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 the complainant and the person or persons against whom the complaint has been made.

Approved by the committee on April 2024

This policy was informed by the national u3a complaints template published Dec 2022

Review dates:

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