

Policy and procedure on complaints and grievances

In any organisation, problems and grievances may occur from time to time and members need to know where to turn for help, advice and support so that, whatever the issue, it can be dealt with quickly, objectively and appropriately.

When joining Stanway u3a, members agree to the terms and conditions of membership. They agree that they will:

- abide by the Aims and Guiding Principles of the u3a movement
- always act in the best interests of the u3a and never do anything to bring the u3a into disrepute
- abide by Stanway u3a's Constitution
- treat fellow members with respect and courtesy at all times
- advise of any change in your personal details
- comply with and support the decisions of Stanway u3a Executive Committee/Trustees.

Stanway u3a has adopted the following policy, based on recommendations from the Third Age Trust.

Problems for a Group Leader within an Interest Group

Problems can arise within a group, for example:

- disruptive and/or unsocial behaviour
- poor attendance/timekeeping
- unsuitability
- failure to pay fees
- disagreement between members

In most cases the Group Leader will be able to sort it out by talking to the member/members in question and resolving it informally and amicably.

If this fails and the problem persists they should refer the matter to their **Group Sector Coordinator** or to the **Group Liaison and Support Sub-Committee Administrator**. They should not allow a situation to continue which impacts on other members of the group.

Problems with the Group Leader

Initially the member/members should try to resolve the problem by discussing it with the Group Leader. If this is unsuccessful or if the member or members involved feel unable to do so, the matter should be referred to the **Group Sector Coordinator** or to the **Group Liaison and Support Sub-Committee Administrator**.

Problems within the u3a as a whole

- Member and the Executive Committee
- Member and an individual member of the Executive Committee
- A member who brings the u3a into disrepute or acts in a way which is prejudicial to the u3a
- A member who causes damage to property and/or equipment through misuse/negligence etc.

The above should all be referred to the Chair in the first instance unless that person is personally involved, in which case it should be referred to the Secretary.

Initial procedure when a problem/grievance is referred

When a complaint is referred, the relevant Sector Coordinator will seek to:

- establish the facts quickly, consulting as many people as possible
- have an informal discussion with all concerned to summarise the problem, hear everybody's views and clear the air
- if he/she feels there is a case to answer but that nevertheless it is a relatively minor issue, make it clear to all present that there must be no repeat of the sort of actions/behaviour which led to the problem
- if he/she feels that the situation warrants a more formal approach or a particular course of action he/she will refer the matter to the full Group Liaison & Support Sub-Committee who, if after appraisal of the situation believe that the problem warrants it, will refer the matter to the Executive Committee which will agree a course of action.

Committee Procedure

If a matter is referred to the full Stanway u3a Executive Committee:

- the relevant people will be invited to meet with 3 members of Stanway u3a Executive Committee (the Arbitrators)
- the matter will be fully discussed with the individual/individuals concerned who shall be given the opportunity to state their case
- written records will be kept
- If the matter concerns an individual Executive Committee member, they may take part in the discussion but will not take part in the decision of the Committee
- the 3 Stanway u3a Arbitrators will then take into account any mitigating circumstances and make a decision which will be communicated in writing.

Possible forms of disciplinary action

Level 1 - a verbal warning about future conduct by an Officer of Stanway u3a with another Officer present, which will be confirmed in writing

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

Level 3 - a final written warning

Level 4 - exclusion from an interest group

Level 5 - termination of u3a membership

Ideally we will be able to sort out most problems either through an informal chat or through Levels 1 or 2.

However, in the case of an extremely serious proven misdemeanour, for example,

- sexual/racial abuse, discrimination, harassment, bullying
- dangerous or violent behaviour
- falsification of expense claims
- theft
- malicious damage
- conduct which brings the u3a into disrepute or is prejudicial to the u3a or the running of the u3a

the Committee has the right to move immediately to Level 3-5.

Right of Appeal

Before a member is excluded from an interest group or has his/her membership terminated, a right of appeal will be offered. An appeal, providing it is lodged within a 7 day period, can take the form of written representation for the Executive Committee to consider or a request for a right of reply. If it is the latter, a meeting of the 3 members of Stanway u3a Executive Committee (who did not initially act as Arbitrators in the case), will be called and the member(s) in question will be asked to attend accompanied by a friend/friends who may also speak.

The whole issue should be summarised and then the member(s) given the opportunity to speak, along with the supporter(s) if so desired. In both cases, the Committee will review its decision, taking into account any mitigating circumstances, and then make a final decision, which must be communicated in writing. As with the initial consideration, in a matter concerning an individual Committee member, that member may contribute to discussion but will not take part in the decision on the appeal.

In following these procedures, Stanway u3a will seek to ensure that:

- every action taken is documented
- problems and grievances are dealt with quickly and fairly
- we do all we can to settle the issue without having to resort to formal disciplinary action
- we maintain confidentiality.

Registered Charity No. 1171008