

## U3AC Complaints policy and procedure

### Introduction

U3AC is a charity whose aim is to provide education, leisure and recreational activities for those not or no longer in full time employment. In doing so we strive to provide our members with the highest standard of service. However, at times this does not always happen and so we believe that complaints offer us an opportunity to listen, learn and act on the feedback that we receive.

### Policy objectives

1. To establish a fair procedure that is clear and easy to use for any member or tutor who wishes to make a complaint about (1) the management and/or administration of U3AC or (2) the behaviour of U3AC staff, tutors or members during U3AC activities
2. To ensure that everyone can easily access the complaints procedure on our website to facilitate the raising of a complaint within U3AC
3. To ensure that U3AC staff, tutors or members who receive a complaint are clear about the procedure to follow
4. To ensure that all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way
5. To ensure that all complaints are handled sensitively and confidentially
6. To ensure that, whenever possible, complaints are resolved to the mutual satisfaction of all parties
7. To maintain a complaints log and report to trustees at Council meetings
8. To make constructive use of any information arising during the complaints procedure that may help U3AC to improve its practices

### Definition of a complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by a member or tutor, whether apparently justified or not, about any aspect of U3AC, including the behaviour of individuals, that cannot be resolved by informal discussion.

### Complaints Procedure

We would like to encourage dialogue between individuals when a concern arises. Often raising an issue, expressing a concern, or giving feedback, can lead to a resolution of an issue. However, if there is no resolution then we would encourage that a complaint is made to U3AC.

### Raising a complaint

Any complaint should be made within three months of the issue that led to the concern. The first step is to discuss with the Office staff. The Office staff respond to routine minor complaints or concerns and usually resolve most of these. These are often about course allocations, fees, communications issues, information, and use of the website. If these are not resolved satisfactorily, or if members and tutors wish to make a formal complaint, then they are referred to Council using the following procedure which has two stages. The Office staff keep a record of the issues of complaints.

### Stage One

Complaints may be raised with the U3AC Office Manager or any Council member and must be put in writing (address to 27-28 Bridge Street, Cambridge CB2 1UJ), or by email ([office@u3ac.org.uk](mailto:office@u3ac.org.uk)). If a

complaint is initially raised in person or on the telephone, it must be followed up by a letter or email. All complaints will be handled confidentially by U3AC staff and Council members and a written record kept.

Council has an appointed trustee (Council member for complaints (CMC)) who will deal with the complaint. If there is a conflict of interest or the CMC is involved in the complaint, then another trustee (Council member) (where there is no conflict of interest) will be appointed by the Chair of the Council of Trustees (the Chair). For all complaints, the CMC will brief the Chair.

Assuming that the CMC is managing the complaint then the first step is informing the U3AC member, tutor or member of staff who has had a complaint made about them, as U3AC have a duty of care to complainees as well as to complainants. In the case of a complaint about U3AC's management or administration, the CMC will have a discussion with the Office Manager, the staff member concerned and/or any necessary Council member(s). In the case of a complaint about the behaviour of a member or tutor then the CMC will contact the complainant(s) and complainees(s) and may invite them to an informal meeting at which the CMC would be present as a facilitator to enable a resolution if possible. All involved in any informal discussions may be supported by another person.

For complaints against tutors, the Director of Studies (Courses) will be informed and may be involved in the discussion. The aim of stage one is to:

- establish the facts of the complaint
- allow discussion between affected individuals
- aim to bring about an amicable outcome.

If no resolution is achieved by informal means in stage one, then the complaint will progress to stage two.

## **Stage two**

A complaint will progress to stage two because:

- There was no resolution at stage one, as judged by any individual involved
- An individual did not engage with the informal process

At this stage, the complaint will be forwarded by the CMC to the Chair. The Chair will acknowledge the request within five working days of receiving it. The acknowledgement will say who will further deal with the complaint and when the complainant may expect a reply.

The Chair may investigate the case or delegate another Council member to do so (where there is no conflict of interest). This will involve reviewing the paperwork of the complaint and speaking with the CMC who dealt with the complaint at stage one. If the complaint relates to a specific person, s/he will be informed and given a further opportunity to respond. Sometimes an investigation may take place if needed.

Decisions about whether to uphold a complaint will normally be made in private at the next regular Council meeting. Sometimes it may be necessary to set up a panel of trustees to decide on a complaint, especially if there is a long wait until the next Council meeting. If the next Council is more than two weeks away from the conclusion of the stage two investigation, then a panel will be set up to consider whether the complaint is upheld or not. Any panel will comprise three trustees, not including the Chair or CMC. Outcomes of panels will be reported at the next Council meeting. Any decisions made at stage two will be communicated to the individuals involved in the complaint within one week of being made. Regardless of whether the complaint is upheld or not, the reply to the complainant will describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken because of the complaint. Council will make decisions about any resulting actions and may involve restrictions on members attending courses or activities if necessary.

The decision taken at stage two is final, unless the Council decides it is appropriate to obtain external assistance to resolve the issue.

If anyone is not happy about how U3AC has managed a complaint or how it manages its affairs, steps that can be taken are outlined via this link <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-charity>

**Approved by Council: 20 February 2025**

**Next review date: February 2027**