

Complaints procedure

Policy objectives

- To establish a fair procedure that is clear and easy to use for any member who wishes to make a complaint about (1) the management and/or administration of U3AC (CIO) or (2) the behaviour of U3AC staff or members in the course of U3AC activities
- To ensure that members can easily access the complaints procedure so that they know how to raise a complaint with U3AC
- To ensure that U3AC staff or members who receive a complaint are clear about the procedure to follow
- To ensure that all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way
- To ensure that all complaints are handled sensitively and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 (GDPR)
- To ensure that, whenever possible, complaints are resolved to the mutual satisfaction of the parties
- 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, whether apparently justified or not, about any aspect of U3AC that cannot be resolved by informal discussion (see stage 1 below).

Procedures

Raising a complaint

Complaints may be raised with the U3AC Office Manager or any Council member either in person, in writing (address to 27-28 Bridge Street, Cambridge CB2 1UJ), by email (office@u3ac.org.uk) or by telephone (01223 321587).

All complaints are handled confidentially by U3AC staff and Council members.

Receiving a complaint

When the complaint is raised in person or on the telephone, the person receiving the complaint will record the following details:

- The facts of the complaint
- The complainant's name, address, email address and telephone number
- Where appropriate, the complainant should be asked to repeat the complaint in writing (by post or by email) so that it is recorded in their own words.
- Information about the complaint will be reported to the Chair of the Council and the Secretary within 5 working days even if it is expected to be resolved informally.

Resolving a complaint, stage 1

- In the first instance members are strongly encouraged to resolve their complaint informally.
- In the case of a complaint about U3AC's management/administration, this will normally be by means of an informal discussion with the Office Manager and/or a Council member.
- In the case of a complaint about the behaviour of another member or members in the course of U3AC activities then the Chair or the Secretary will designate another Council member to contact the complainant(s) and the other member(s) to invite them to an informal meeting at which the designated Council member would be present as a facilitator to enable a resolution if possible.

- If no resolution is achieved by this means, then this will be reported to the Chair and the Secretary.
- In the case of a complaint about U3AC's administration/management, the Chair will take responsibility for stage 2.
- In the case of a complaint about the behaviour of another member or members, the designated Council member (above) will take responsibility for stage 2.

Resolving a complaint, stage 2

- When it is agreed by all parties that the complaint cannot be resolved informally, a formal acknowledgement will be sent to the complainant(s) within 5 working days by the Chair or by the designated Council member as appropriate. The acknowledgement will refer the complainant(s) to the Complaints procedure policy on the U3AC website, noting that the Chair/ the Council member has been designated to deal with the complaint formally and stating that U3AC's aim is to provide a full response within 20 working days.
- The Chair/designated Council member will consult any other Council members and/or U3AC staff who may have an interest in the issues raised by the complainant.
- If the complaint relates to a specific person (or persons), they will be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond. Ideally this will be at a meeting of both parties called by the designated Council member at the earliest opportunity, at which the designated Council member will be present as a mediator, with the expectation that the complaint can thereby be resolved. If those involved do not mutually agree to meet together, the designated Council member will meet them separately to try to resolve the differences.
- The complainant(s) should receive a full response within 20 working days of the date of acknowledgement. If this is not possible because, for example, the investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report will be sent with an indication of when they will receive a full response.
- Whether a complaint is considered justified or not, the full response to the complainant(s) should describe the action taken to investigate it, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.
- If the complaint refers to a specific person (or persons) they will likewise be informed of the action taken, conclusions, etc.

Resolving a complaint, stage 3

- If the complainant(s) feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at stage 2, they may request that the complaint be reviewed by the Council as a whole.
- The request for review by Council will be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt, and the complainant(s) told that U3AC's aim is to provide a full response within 20 working days of receipt..
- The complaint will be passed to the Secretary, who may investigate the facts of the case themselves, or, where appropriate, ask another Council member to do so (providing this does not create a conflict of interest).
- If the complaint relates to a specific person (or persons), they will be informed that it has now been referred to the Council, and given a further opportunity to respond.
- Ideally the complainant(s) will receive a full response within 20 working days of the request. If this is not possible because, for example, the investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report will be sent with an indication of when they will receive a full response.
- The decision of Council, after consideration of the facts of the case, is final.
- Whether or not a complaint is upheld, the reply to the complainant(s) should describe the actions taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions drawn by Council, and any actions taken as a result of the complaint.
- If the complaint refers to a specific person (or persons) they will likewise be informed of the action taken, conclusions, etc.

U3AC views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right for the complainant(s).

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Next review date: February 2026

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