

Sorting out Problems and Grievances

In any organisation, problems and grievances 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 and objectively and appropriately.

PROBLEMS FOR A GROUP CONVENOR WITHIN AN INTEREST GROUP

Problems can arise within a group e.g.

- Disruptive and/or unsocial behaviour.
- Poor attendance/timekeeping.
- Unsuitability.
- Failure to pay fees.
- Disagreement between members.

In most cases the group convenor will be able to resolve the situation informally and amicably by just by having a quiet word with the member/members in question. In certain situations, asking a member to leave the group for the remainder of the session may well be the best solution.

If it requires more or this fails and the problem persists the group convenor should refer the matter to the Groups' Co-ordinator on the committee or if that role does not exist, the trustee on the committee designated to deal with problems/grievances. The Group convenor should not allow a situation to continue which impacts on the enjoyment of other members of the group.

Group convenors should not have the authority to exclude a member from the group permanently. That decision must be made by the committee and should a convenor refuse to have a member in the group, it will not be possible for that group to continue with that member running it. Similarly if a convenor refuses to have a particular member in his/her house, then it will not be possible for the group to continue to be hosted there.

PROBLEMS WITH THE GROUP CONVENOR

Initially, the member/members should try to resolve the problem by discussing it with the group convenor. However, if this is unsuccessful or if the member/members involved feel unable to do so, the matter should be referred to the Groups' Co-ordinator or the designated trustee.

PROBLEMS WITHIN THE U3A AS A WHOLE

- Member to member.
- Member and the committee.
- Member and an individual trustee.
- 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 designated trustee in the first instance unless that person is personally involved, in which case, the Chairman will decide who should take over.

INITIAL PROCEDURE WHEN A PROBLEM/GRIEVANCE IS REFERRED

- 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 you feel there is a case to answer but that nevertheless it is a minor issue, make it clear to all present that there must be no repeat of the sort of actions/behaviour which led to this problem.
- If, however, you feel that the situation warrants a more formal approach or a particular course of action e.g. exclusion from an interest group, you should refer the matter to the committee to agree a course of action.

COMMITTEE PROCEDURE

It is advisable to invite all the people involved to attend a minuted meeting with either some or all members of the committee so that the matter can be fully discussed and an opportunity provided for everybody to state their case.

The committee will then consider the matter, taking into account any mitigating circumstances and agree what action to take.

POSSIBLE FORMS OF DISCIPLINARY ACTION

- Level 1 - a verbal warning about future conduct by an elected officer with another officer present, which should 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.

For most problems you will start at level 1. 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 Levels 3, 4 or 5.

RIGHT OF APPEAL

Before a member is excluded from an interest group or has his/her membership terminated, a right of appeal should be offered and in the case of expulsion from the U3A, must be offered. An appeal, providing it is lodged within a 7 day period, can take the form of written representation for the committee to consider or a request for a right of reply. If it is the latter, a meeting of the whole committee should be called and the member in question should be asked to attend and can be accompanied by a friend who may also speak in a personal capacity. The whole issue should be summarised and then the member given the opportunity to speak, along with the supporter 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.

PLEASE REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING

- You must ensure every action you take is documented.
- You must deal with problems and grievances quickly and fairly.
- You should do all you can to settle the issue without having to resort to formal disciplinary action.
- You should maintain confidentiality.