

The Study Society Complaints Procedure

Publicised Contact Details for Complaints

Written complaints may be sent to the Study Society at Colet House, 151 Talgarth Road, London W14 9DA or by e-mail to office@studysociety.org Verbal complaints may be made by phone to 020 8748 9338 or in person to any of the Society's staff, volunteers or trustees at Colet House or at any Study Society event or activity held in any other premises.

Receiving Complaints

Complaints may arrive through channels publicised for that purpose or through any other contact details or opportunities the complainant may have. Complaints received by telephone or in person need to be recorded. The person who receives a phone or in person complaint should:

- Write down the facts of the complaint
- Take the complainant's name, address and telephone number
- Note down the relationship of the complainant to the Study Society (for example: member, participant in a discussion group)
- Tell the complainant that we have a complaints procedure
- Tell the complainant what will happen next and how long it will take
- Arrange with the complainant how s/he would like to access the record of the complaint in order to confirm its accuracy

For further guidelines about handling verbal complaints, see **Appendix 1**

Resolving Complaints

Stage One

In many cases, a complaint is best resolved by the person responsible for the issue being complained about. If the complaint has been received by that person, s/he may be able to resolve it swiftly and should do so if possible and appropriate. Whether or not the complaint has been resolved, the complaint information should be passed to the Society's Honorary Secretary within one week.

On receiving the complaint, the Honorary Secretary records it in the complaints log. If it has not already been resolved, s/he delegates an appropriate person to investigate it and to take appropriate action.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, that person should be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond.

Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within no longer than two weeks and sooner if possible. The acknowledgement should say who is dealing with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply. A copy of this complaints procedure should be attached.

Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within four weeks. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

Whether the complaint is justified or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

Stage Two

If the complainant feels that the problem has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage One, s/he can request that the complaint is reviewed at Board level. At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the Chair of the Board.

The request for Board level review should be acknowledged within a week of receiving it. The acknowledgement should say who will deal with the case and when the complainant can expect a reply.

The Chair of the Board will appoint two members of the Board to investigate the facts of the case themselves. This will involve reviewing the paperwork of the case, including the outcome, speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage One and speaking with the complainant to establish why s/he wishes to pursue their complaint to Board level.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, s/he should be informed and given a further opportunity to respond.

The person who dealt with the original complaint at Stage One should be kept informed of what is happening.

Ideally complainants should receive a definitive reply within four weeks. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, a progress report should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

Whether the complaint is upheld or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken to investigate the complaint, the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

The decision taken at this stage is final, unless the Board decides it is appropriate to seek external assistance with resolution. The Board will identify an appropriate organisation. In the event of this not being acceptable to the complainant, the matter will be referred to the Charity Commission, who will accept such referrals.

Variation of the Complaints Procedure

The Board may vary the procedure for good reason. This may be necessary to avoid a conflict of interest, for example, a complaint about the Chair should not be assigned to Board members by the Chair for a Stage Two review. The Honorary Secretary has the discretion to ask two individuals to investigate and take appropriate action.

Monitoring and Learning from Complaints

Complaints are reviewed annually to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action. Details of these will be available on request / posted on the Society's website

Appendix 1 - Practical Guidance for Handling Verbal Complaints

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation – don't take the complaint personally
- Listen - allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words. Sometimes a person just wants to "let off steam"
- Don't debate the facts, especially if the person is angry
- Show an interest in what is being said
- Obtain details about the complaint before any personal details
- Ask for clarification wherever necessary
- Show that you have understood the complaint by reflecting back what you have noted down and, at the end of the complaint, asking the complainant to confirm, by adding his/her signature, that the notes you have made are an accurate record
- Acknowledge the person's feelings (even if you feel that s/he is being unreasonable) - you can do this without making a comment on the complaint itself or making any admission of fault on behalf of the organisation e.g "I understand that this situation is frustrating for you" "I can see that you are upset" "I realise that you wish to have this looked into".
- If you feel confident that an apology is deserved for something that was the responsibility of your organisation, then apologise
- Ask the person what s/he would like done to resolve the issue but be clear that you are not offering to carry this out nor give any assurance that it will be carried out by others.
- Be clear about what you can do, according to the Complaints Procedure, how long it will take and what it will involve.
- Don't, under any circumstances, promise things you can't deliver
- Give clear and valid reasons why requests cannot be met
- Make sure that the person understands what s/he has been told
- Wherever appropriate, inform the person about the available avenues of review or appeal

Approved by the Board of Trustees on 5th May 2015