

# CHANGING THE CHEMISTRY

IMPROVING BOARD EFFECTIVENESS



## Changing the Chemistry

### Complaints Policy and Procedure

Version	Author	Approved	Approved by	Owner	Notes
1		13/9/16	Steering Group		
2.0		13/1/20		Roger Duerden	
2.1		21/4/21	Board	Board Lead for Policies	Minor updates to reflect new Organisation structure
2.2	JAJ	28/7/23	Board	Board lead for policies	Simplification of policy and procedure
2.3	SC	15/10/23	Alice Paterson		Contact email address for complaints updated

# **Complaints Policy and Procedure**

## **1. Purpose of the Policy**

- 1.1. CtC aims to offer excellent service to its members and supporters but recognises that we may not always get things right. An effective complaints procedure is important in maintaining and building relationships with the people on whom our charity depends. CtC views complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future, as well as a chance to put things right for the person or organisation that has made the complaint.
- 1.2. We will:
  - provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint
  - publicise the existence of our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint
  - make sure everyone at CtC knows what to do if a complaint is received
  - make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way
  - make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired
  - gather information which helps us to improve what we do

## **2. Definition of a Complaint**

- 2.1. A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of CtC. Complaints may come from our members, partner organisations or stakeholders. A complaint can be received verbally, by telephone, by email or in writing. We may also choose to treat comments communicated via social media as complaints.
- 2.2. This policy does not cover complaints from employed staff or individuals working for CtC on contract, who should instead pursue a grievance with the President or Chair.

## **3. Confidentiality**

- 3.1. All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know and following any relevant data protection requirements.
- 3.2. If a CtC member raises a complaint they should maintain confidentiality whilst the investigation is ongoing.

## **4. Responsibility**

Overall responsibility for this policy and oversight of its implementation lies with the board of trustees. It is reviewed regularly and updated as required.

## 5. Making a Complaint

### 5.1. Receiving Complaints

It should be recognised that complaints may arrive through other contacts or channels, and may be made verbally. The complainant should be politely asked to send a written account by post or by email (see 5.1) so that the complaint is recorded in the complainant's own words.

Details of verbal complaints received by telephone or in person should be recorded in writing and sent to the Governance trustee. A copy should also be sent to the complainant. Specifically, the recipient of the complaint should:

- Write down the facts of the complaint
- Take the complainant's name, address, email address and telephone number
- Note down the relationship of the complainant to CtC (e.g. member, donor etc.)
- Explain CtC's complaints procedure and direct them to the CtC website for further information.
- Ask the complainant to send a written account by post or by email (see 5.1).
- For further guidelines about handling verbal complaints, see Appendix 1.

### 5.2. Timescales for Resolving Complaints

CtC takes complaints very seriously. We will endeavour to resolve a complaint within **eight weeks** of the complaint being made. If this is not possible because, for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, an update should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

### 5.3. Resolving Complaints – Stage One

- 5.3.1. In many cases, a complaint is best resolved by the person responsible for the issue being complained about e.g. COO or President. If the complaint has been received by that person, they may be able to resolve it swiftly and should do so if possible and appropriate.
- 5.3.2. Whether or not the complaint has been resolved, the complaint information should be passed to the Governance trustee within **five working days**. On receiving the complaint, the Governance trustee records it in the complaints log. If it has not already been resolved, the Governance trustee or Chair may delegate an appropriate person to investigate it and to take appropriate action.
- 5.3.3. If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond.
- 5.3.4. Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint **within two weeks** of the complaint being made. The acknowledgement should say who is dealing

with the complaint and when the person complaining can expect a reply. A link to the complaints procedure shall be attached.

- 5.3.5. Whether the complaint is justified or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken following receipt of the complaint, and (if this resulted in an investigation) the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

#### 5.4. Resolving Complaints – Stage Two

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

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

- 5.4.3. The Chair may investigate the facts of the case themselves or delegate to another trustee to do so.

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

- 5.4.4. Ideally, complainants should receive a definitive reply within **six weeks** of being passed to the Chair. If this is not possible because for example, an investigation has not been fully completed, an update should be sent with an indication of when a full reply will be given.

- 5.4.5. Whether the complaint is upheld or not, the reply to the complainant should describe the action taken following receipt of the complaint, and (if this resulted in an investigation) the conclusions from the investigation, and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

- 5.4.6. The decision taken at this stage is final, unless the Board decides it is appropriate to seek external assistance with resolution.

- 5.4.7. The complainant is entitled to complain to OSCR at any stage. Information about the kind of complaints OSCR can involve itself in can be found on their website at [www.oscr.co.uk](http://www.oscr.co.uk).

#### 5.5. Contact Details for Complaints

- Written complaints may be sent

by email to [chair@changingthechemistry.org](mailto:chair@changingthechemistry.org)

or

by post to CtC's registered office at 3a Dublin Meuse, Edinburgh EH3 6NW

- Verbal complaints may be made by telephone or in person to the President, Governance Trustee or Chair

## **6. Variation of the Complaints Procedure**

The Board may vary the procedure if there is good reason to do so. This may be necessary to avoid a conflict of interest; for example, a complaint about the Governance trustee or Chair should not also have that person leading any stage of the review process.

## **7. Monitoring and Learning from Complaints**

The log of received complaints is reviewed annually by the Board to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action.

## **Appendix 1 - Practical Guidance for Handling Verbal Complaints**

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation.
- Obtain the full details of the complaint before taking down any personal details.
- **Listen** – allow the complainant to talk about the issue in their own words. Sometimes a person just wants to "let off steam".
- **Respect** – don't debate the facts in the first instance, especially if the complainant is angry.
- **Suspend judgement** – maintain an open mind, show an interest in what is being said and ask for clarification where necessary.
- **Reflect** – show that you have understood the complaint by reflecting back what you have noted down and acknowledging the complainant's feelings, even if you feel that they are being unreasonable. (You can do this without making a comment on the complaint itself or making any admission of fault on behalf of CtC, eg. by saying "I can see that this situation is frustrating for you".)
- If you feel that an apology is deserved for something that was the responsibility of CtC, then apologise without admitting fault, eg. by saying "I am sorry that this situation has upset you".
- Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issue.
- Be clear about what you can do, how long it will take and what it will involve.
- Don't promise things you can't deliver.
- Give clear and valid reasons why any of the complainant's requests cannot be met.
- Make sure that the complainant understands what they have been told.
- Wherever appropriate, inform the complainant about the available avenues of review or appeal.