



## Complaints Policy

### Purpose

Creative Alliance 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. This policy should be applied across the organisation in a consistent and transparent way. We aim to treat any complainants in a manner consistent with our key values. **This policy does not cover complaints from staff. These should be considered under Creative Alliance's Discipline and Grievance policies.**

### Our policy is:

- To provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear and easy to use for anyone wishing to make a complaint
- To publicise the existence of our complaints procedure so that people know how to contact us to make a complaint
- To make sure everyone at Creative Alliance knows what to do if a complaint is received
- To make sure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way
- To make sure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and that relationships are repaired
- To gather information which helps us to improve what we do
- To ensure that all complaints about our service will be taken seriously and thoroughly investigated
- To ensure that complainants will, at all times, be treated with respect and courtesy and kept informed about the progress of any investigation

### The process will:

- Be fair and transparent to all parties: complainant, staff and volunteers
- Aim to resolve any complaint in a timely and effective way
- Aim to improve services in the future: it is an iterative process
- Be clear and easy to understand and access, particularly taking into account those who may not be able to access traditional contact methods or who may have communication issue
- Be based on the provision of timely and accurate information to all interested parties
- Be confidential (as far as possible) so that people can speak freely and so that best evidence will be available
- Be subject to ongoing monitoring to make sure that it is being applied consistently in an effective way throughout the organisation

### Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of Creative Alliance. It is an expression of dissatisfaction, which requires a response. If a complaint is received it is important to clarify if it is:

1. An informal complaint where the service user does not wish to pursue a formal process but wishes to have a concern acknowledged and addressed;

2. A formal complaint, which should be in writing.

In both cases the complaint must be acknowledged and recorded. In the case of a formal complaint the procedure outlined below must be followed.

### **Where Complaints Come From**

Complaints may come from any existing or potential freelance associate, client, learner, partner organisation or member of the public engaging with our services. A complaint can be received verbally, by phone, by email or in writing.

### **Timescale**

The usual timescale for making a complaint is 1 month from the date when the incident took place or came to light. However, in very serious cases or where the complainant is particularly vulnerable, this timeframe may be extended. A formal process would not usually be undertaken after a calendar year has elapsed – this will be at the discretion of the Director.

### **Access (Making a Complaint)**

Making a complaint is not always an easy thing to do. It is important that people feel able to voice their concerns and complaints and that they can be assured that they will be taken seriously and treated fairly. Staff will make it clear to complainants that they will be given time and a fair hearing. They should always be offered the opportunity to attend any meetings with a friend of their choice and, if they so wish, appoint someone as their agent to manage the process on their behalf.

### **Confidentiality**

All complaint information will be handled sensitively, telling only those who need to know and following any relevant data protection requirements.

### **Responsibility**

Overall responsibility for this policy and its implementation lies with the Director and the board members of the organisation.

## **Complaints Procedure**

### **Receiving Complaints**

Complaints may arrive through channels publicised for that purpose or through any other contact details or opportunities the complainant may have.

Written complaints may be sent to Creative Alliance at 213 Scott House, The Custard Factory, Gibb Street, Birmingham B9 4AA

E-mail complaints can be made to [info@creativealliance.org.uk](mailto:info@creativealliance.org.uk).

Verbal complaints may be made by telephone via 0121 753 0049 or in person to any of Creative Alliance's staff or board members.

Complaints received by telephone or in person need to be recorded. The person who receives a telephone 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 Creative Alliance, for example client or learner

- Tell the complainant that we have a complaints procedure
- Tell the complainant what will happen next and how long it will take
- Where appropriate, ask the complainant to send a written account by post or by email so that the complaint is recorded in the complainant's own words
- 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, they 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 Director within two weeks.

On receiving the complaint, the recipient should record it in the complaints log. If it has not been resolved, the recipient should delegate an appropriate person to investigate it and to take appropriate action. If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed and given a fair opportunity to respond.

Complaints should be acknowledged by the person handling the complaint within two weeks. 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, they can request that the complaint is reviewed at board level. At this stage, the complaint will be passed to the current chair of the board.

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

The designated board member will investigate the facts of the case themselves or delegate a suitably senior person to do so. This may involve reviewing the paperwork of the case and speaking with the person who dealt with the complaint at Stage One.

If the complaint relates to a specific person, they 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 eight 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.

### **Monitoring and Learning from Complaints**

Complaints are reviewed annually to identify any trends which may indicate a need to take further action.

### **Monitoring of the Policy**

Creative Alliance's Board, Director and Operations Manager are responsible for monitoring the implementation of this policy.

**Policy Prepared by:** Sarah Harding (for Creative Alliance)

**Policy Reviewed on:** May 2019

**Policy to be Reviewed:** May 2020 (or earlier if there are changes in relevant legislation or in response to any significant incidents or changes in circumstances)

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

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation
- 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 in the first instance, 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
- Acknowledge the person'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 the organisation e.g. "I understand that this situation is frustrating for you"
- If you feel that an apology is deserved for something that was the responsibility of the organisation, then apologise
- 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 requests cannot be met
- Make sure that the person understands what they have been told
- Wherever appropriate, inform the person about the available avenues of review or appeal