



Complaints Policy and Procedure

How a complaint is handled is very dependent on the nature of it and this procedure is not meant to be exhaustive.

General principles

The Society wants to use any feedback and complaints by its members or others with whom it has a relationship as a positive method of review, changing and developing. Therefore any formal complaints must be made in writing directly to the Society by email to info@soc-botanical-artists.org or by mail to the office address. Upon receipt this will be acknowledged and redirected to the appropriate personnel to handle. It therefore follows that the Society is unable to respond to complaints which are made by telephone or mobile messages to Society personnel or posted on social media. In the first instance the Society would aim to settle any complaint or dispute amicably.

The procedure is designed to ensure that, wherever possible, an informal resolution is attempted and the complaints procedure should be investigatory rather than adversarial. The procedure is intended for those persons who may have a legitimate complaint. The responsibility for dealing with complaints lies solely with the Council, except where the Charity Commission, Companies House or the Police would have an interest in it. Anonymous complaints will not be investigated unless there are exceptional circumstances. It is helpful to place a limit on the time after which a complaint will normally not be considered, for instance, within three months of the event being complained of, save in exceptional circumstances. Investigation of the complaint will be given to a Council member to look into and possibly meet with the complainant, dealing with names of potential witnesses/corroborations, dates and times of events, copies of relevant documents, whatever supporting information will be needed. The Council member will report on investigation and suggest the remedy, if any, which shall be completed as soon as reasonably practicable and the complainant informed in writing that (a) there was insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion, so the complaint cannot be upheld; (b) the concern is not substantiated by the evidence; (c) the concern was substantiated in part or in full but that a procedural failure did not affect the outcome significantly so the matter is now closed; or (d) the concern was substantiated in part or in full and the Council will take steps to prevent a recurrence or to rectify the situation.

General activities of the Society

There is a difference between an observation or feedback, and a valid complaint. As far as the SBA general activities are concerned, complaints could emanate from: members of any category; the general public including non members, exhibition visitors and buyers; organisations or groups working with the Society; companies providing services to the Society; or any member of the Council. Complaints could be discussed with others but there is no onus on the Society to deal with any complaint unless it is formally made (as above). There is an expectation that its members, acting on behalf of the Society, may pass informal complaints to the Council but there is no guarantee of this. Complaints may be about any nature such as misleading or fraudulent transactions, non-compliance with Society rules, illegal activities, a serious occurrence concerning an exhibition, health and safety issues; any member including a trustee acting outside capacity; petty or serious allegations without evidence; any member or trustee acting in a way which is injurious to the Society; or any use of social media which is harmful to a member or the Society.

Complaints should in the first instance be directed in writing directly to the Society by email to info@soc-botanical-artists.org or by mail to the office address. Upon receipt this will be acknowledged and redirected to the appropriate personnel to handle. It therefore follows that the Society is unable to respond to complaints which are made by telephone or mobile messages to Society personnel or posted on social media. If it is to be taken further, it could be discussed with other Council members and/or the President. If the complaint is about the President, the Council (excluding the President) must decide what to do, given the general guidelines for the procedure to be investigatory rather than adversarial. In the first instance the Society would aim to settle any complaint or dispute amicably. An unreasonable refusal by the complainant to attempt an informal resolution may result in the procedure being terminated forthwith.

Distance Learning Diploma Course

There is a difference between an observation, feedback and a complaint. As far as the DLDC is concerned, complaints could emanate from: students, tutors, the Course Director or administrator, and be directed against any of the foregoing; or any use of social media which is harmful to a student, a tutor, another member or the Society. The nature of any complaint about the course is likely to be from a student about a tutor, or the management and administration of the Course, or about a result.

As an informal stage, the student should communicate directly with the tutor verbally or in writing. Many concerns can be resolved by simple clarification or the provision of information and it is anticipated that most complaints will be resolved by this informal stage. An unreasonable refusal by the complainant to attempt an informal resolution may result in the procedure being terminated forthwith. In some cases, it may not be appropriate to address the complaint directly to the tutor in which case it should be directed to the Course Director.

As a formal stage the complaint should be directed in writing by mail or by email to the Course Director. The Course Director will evaluate the complaint and in general the remedy for complaints about tutors and their advice and marking is (a) to reallocate the assignment(s) because, given the nature of the teaching service it is a given that a tutor will not necessarily empathise with a student; (b) all students receive a copy of the cancellation and refund policy but in serious cases and depending how far through the course, the Course Director may authorise a refund of some or all of the course fees.

If the complaint is about the Course Director, the trustees (excluding the Course Director) must decide what to do, given the general guidelines for the procedure to be investigatory rather than adversarial.

The complaints policy and procedure is made available to all categories of membership via the website.