



Complaints and Feedback Policy and Procedure 2016

The Spiritual Companions Trust considers feedback from its students, staff and partners to be crucial to the development, and continuing professional growth of the programmes we offer.

We seek to gather feedback about how students experience our programmes, and what they feel is beneficial, and what might be further developed.

We understand that at times there may be complaints about the Trust or its educational programmes.

This document aims to set out;

- The aims of our complaints process
- The way complaints will be handled
- Who is responsible for managing complaints
- How we collect feedback
- The process for academic appeals
- Complaints about other students
- Complaints about graduates
- How complaints are recorded and reported

1. Aims

The Trust aims to handle all complaints in a fair and timely fashion. The Trust welcomes feedback, and complaints where necessary to help it improve its services and programmes. Individuals may make a complaint at any time from enquiry through to completion of their course. There is a section at the end of this document relating to graduates of the diploma programme.

The scope of the policy covers;

- Complaints about the delivery of our programmes that cannot be resolved informally.
- Complaints about the conduct of our tutors.
- Complaints about services provided by the Trust.

The satisfaction of those who use our services is of great importance to the Trust, and it is hoped that the majority of complaints can be dealt with on an informal basis.

Where a complaint needs to become formal the Trust will use the procedure outlined below to deal with complaints in a straightforward and transparent manner.

The Trust requests that complainants provide full details of their complaint so that the issues raised can be fully investigated.

2. Processes

Informal Stage

It is hoped that the majority of complaints may be handled informally. This can help to resolve an issue quickly and directly. Students may initiate the informal process in the following ways;

- By speaking directly to the tutor or person that the complaint is about. This will be kept confidential between student and tutor unless the student wants the complaint to be disclosed.
- By raising the issue during the regular tutor group meeting. All members of the tutor group, and the group tutor will be present in this meeting.

It is requested that student take forward complaints within 10 (working) days of the concern taking place.

Conciliation Stage

It is understood that a student may feel uncomfortable in speaking directly to a tutor, or member of staff and in these cases conciliation with a third party present may help to resolve the complaint.

To commence the conciliation process the student should complete the Trust's complaints form and send it to the Trust Administrator who will arrange for an independent staff member to facilitate a conciliation meeting. The student will be entitled to have a peer attend the meeting with them for support if desired.

A request for a conciliation meeting should be acknowledged by email within 7 days of receipt, and the meeting should take place within 28 days of the request.

The outcome of the meeting will be noted.

Formal Stage

A complainant may move directly to this stage if they consider that the complaint cannot be resolved informally.

In all cases the complaints form must be completed and sent to the Trust Administrator. The form should be submitted within 10 days of the concern occurring unless there is a reason why this cannot happen.

The Administrator will arrange for an independent person to investigate the complaint. This can include interviewing other people who are named in the complaint, or who were witnesses to the concern that has been reported.

The Administrator will acknowledge receipt of the complaint by email within 7 days, and the investigation will be concluded within 28 days. If an extension is required the complainant will be advised by email.

Following investigation a complaints hearing will be arranged. Attendees will be;

Hearing Officer (not previously involved in the case)
 Investigating Officer
 Complainant (and a peer for support if required)
 Complainee
 Note taker

The Hearing Officer will hear the presentation by the Investigating Officer, and will question complainant and complainee. At the end of the meeting the Hearing Officer will take time out to make a judgment. In complex cases the Hearing Officer may take up to 14 days to make a judgement.

Any decision that may result in a student being excluded, a tutor being dismissed or where a report is required to an external body, must be ratified by the Director of the Trust.

Appeals

An email against the judgment of a formal hearing may be made by writing the Trust Administrator within 10 days of receiving the judgement of the complaints hearing.

The Chair of the Trustee Board, or a trustee appointed by the Chair, will arrange an appeals meeting within 28 days of the appeal request on the proviso that new information has come to light that could not of been included in the original hearing.

The Chair or delegated trustee may decide to overturn the decision of the complaints hearing or the judgement may be upheld. This decision will be final.

3. Who is responsible for handling complaints

The Trust Administrator is responsible for receiving and recording all formal complaints. The Administrator will liaise with the Trust Director to ensure that independent persons are identified to investigate and hear complaints. The Administrator will be the first point of contact for student enquiries about complaints.

4. **How we collect feedback**

The Trust needs student feedback to ensure that its programmes meet the needs of students. Student involvement in the continuing quality improvement is essential, and the Trust aims to see students as partners in the learning experience.

The Trust's learner voice system is focused on a tutor group system. All students will be members of a tutor group, and there will be scheduled meetings during each programme to invite discuss student feedback.

Students will also be members of a home group. This group will consist of a group of students who will provide each other with personal and academic support.

5. Academic Appeals

At times a student may feel that they have been unfairly assessed. If this does happen the student should discuss the assessment with their tutor in the first instance. If a student is not satisfied after discussion with the tutor they should contact the Trust Administrator in writing or by email with full details of the complaint, and a copy of the marked assessment. The Administrator will arrange for an investigation.

The outcome of an appeal may be;

- Appeal upheld, and work will be re-marked by another tutor.
- Original mark upheld

Please note that students with mitigating circumstances i.e.. diagnosed dyslexia/immediate family illness must disclose the circumstance as soon as they occur and provide written evidence.

6. Complaints about other students

This procedure does not cover complaints about other students. If a student has a complaint about another student they should try to resolve the issue together informally where possible. Where this is not possible the student making the complaint should make a report to the tutor who will arrange a conciliation meeting, or instigate an investigation.

Students will only be suspended pending investigation when it is necessary. In these cases the suspended student will provided with course work to complete at home. Communication about course work will only take place between the tutor and suspended student. Communication may take place by telephone, Skype, or email.

7. Complaints about graduates

Graduates of the Diploma programme are qualified to provide spiritual companionship — as defined by the Spiritual Companions Agreement (see *Code of Conduct*) — to the general public. All graduates work to a published code of conduct and are required to hold individual insurance.

Graduates are not employed by the Trust and work independently or within an organisational context. Companionship should always be offered explicitly to clients so

that the client is aware of whether their complaint is about companionship or another service i.e. life coaching.

If a client has a complaint about a graduate the Trust asks be informed of the complaint so that it can ensure that the graduate is working within the required code of professional

8. Records and reporting

The Trust will keep a confidential record of all complaints for seven years. The Trust will present a written report of all complaints to Trustees at each Trustee meeting.

William Bloom
Director
October 2016