

COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK POLICY

Current from January 2022; renewable January 2023
See also separate 'SCT Appeals Policy'

OVERVIEW

The Spiritual Companions Trust considers feedback from its learners, 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 learners 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 sets out:

1. The aims of the complaints process
2. Processes: the way complaints are handled
3. Who is responsible for managing complaints
4. How the Trust collects feedback
5. The process for academic appeals
6. Complaints about other learners
7. Complaints about graduates
8. 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 and after graduating.

The scope of the policy covers:

1. Complaints about the delivery of our programmes that cannot be resolved informally.
2. Complaints about the conduct of our tutors.
3. 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: the way complaints are handled

Informal Stage

It is hoped that the majority of complaints may be handled informally. This can help to resolve an issue quickly and directly. Learners 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 learner and tutor unless the learner 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 learners take forward complaints within 10 working days of the concern taking place.

Conciliation Stage

It is understood that a learner 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 learner 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 learner 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 the Spiritual Companions Trust 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 Trust 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 Trust 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 learner 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 to 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 have 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 managing 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 learner enquiries about complaints.

4. How the Trust collects feedback

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

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

Learners are members of a home group. This group consists of a group of learners who provide each other with personal and academic support.

5. The process for academic appeals

At times a learner may feel that they have been unfairly assessed. If this does happen the learner should discuss the assessment with their tutor in the first instance. If a learner 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 learners with mitigating circumstances e.g. diagnosed dyslexia/immediate family illness must disclose the circumstances as soon as they occur and provide written evidence.

6. Complaints about other learners

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

Learners will only be suspended pending investigation when it is necessary. In these cases the suspended learner will be provided with course work to complete at home. Communication about course work will only take place between the tutor and suspended learner. 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. Graduates have a responsibility to make their clients aware of the distinction between Spiritual Companionship and other services e.g. life coaching.

If a client has a complaint about a graduate offering Spiritual Companionship the Trust asks to be informed of the complaint so that it can enquire and ensure that the graduate is working within the required code of professional conduct.



8. How complaints are recorded and reported

The Trust will keep a confidential record of all complaints for 7 years. The Trust will present a written report of all complaints to Trustees at each Trustee meeting.

For any questions on the Complaints and Feedback Policy please contact the course tutor – contact details available on the Spiritual Companions Trust website – or the Spiritual Companions Trust administrator at diana@spiritualcompanions.org

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