



CLIMBING OUT OF DEPRESSION

Complaints Policy

Complaints Policy – Version 1	Board Approved: September 2025
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Introduction

Within the limits of its resources and constitution COOD is committed to providing the best possible service to its participants. Individuals and organisations that are unhappy about the service they receive from COOD should be clear about how to raise their concerns. Furthermore, they should know that the organisation welcomes such critical

feedback and will deal with it in a positive way that does not seek to evade the issues raised by the complainant.

The procedure outlined below aims to provide the necessary clarity as to how complaints will be dealt with. This document details the workings of the procedure as needs to be understood by COOD staff, trustees and volunteers.

The positive handling of any complaint, however, does not depend solely on having a written procedure. It depends very much on how people who want to raise a complaint are treated, particularly at the first point of contact. Since any staff member, Instructor, volunteer or Trustee could be that first point of contact by a complainant, it is necessary for all of us to ensure that we listen carefully, are encouraging and not defensive. For most people it is difficult to raise a complaint, and we should thus assume that if they have reached the stage of wanting to give voice to their complaint, that they have something important to say.

Part one – Critical friend feedback

The first procedure is to be followed when a participant provides critical feedback that is not a formal complaint. This kind of feedback may provide valuable information that can help shape future services and how expectations are communicated.

Part two – A formal complaint

This procedure outlines how formal complaints will be managed and the escalation levels.

Part three – A complaint received about a third-party organisation

Part one – Critical friend feedback

All COOD participants, volunteers and stakeholders are to be encouraged to provide constructive critical feedback on COOD services. Feedback might be given verbally or in writing; either way it should be passed to COOD's Chair, who will share the information with Trustees. The organisation will consider the feedback and explore whether any changes or improvements need to be made.

Part two – A formal complaint

When a Concern is First Raised

People have the right to choose where, when, how and with whom in the organisation they will raise concerns. Any staff member or trustee who is approached should be aware that the person may not be aware that there is a procedure for handling complaints. The initial response should therefore be:

I. to listen and clarify the issues at stake without sounding bureaucratic or formal.

II. to explain that COOD wants to hear their views and that a procedure has been set up to make sure formal complaints are dealt with properly.

III. to establish whether or not the person wants to use the formal procedure (in which case proceed to Stage 1 of the complaint procedure outlined below).

It is important to recognise that it is at this stage that some concerns or complaints may be resolved. Depending on the gravity of the complaint, it may be that the simple act of listening is satisfactory enough for the complainant.

Alternatively, it may be that misunderstandings can be cleared up or simple actions taken to resolve concerns without the need for a formal complaint. If, having talked through their concern, the person is still unhappy, then every encouragement to move to Stage 1 should be given. It is clear, however, that COOD cannot formally take up the complaint if the person does not wish to take it further.

Stages of the Complaints Procedure

There are three stages in the complaints procedure, and each complaint should start at the first stage and progress through until it has been resolved. The Chair has the discretion to bypass stages if warranted.

If any formal complaints are made about the Chair of COOD the process should start at Stage 2, with another Trustee performing the role normally undertaken by the Chair.

Stage 1 – Senior staff level

A Stage 1 complaint begins as soon as we have received notification of it. The person who receives the complaint should notify the Chair. The Chair will typically pass the complaint onto the person with responsibility for the area which is the subject of the complaint.

The Chair has the discretion to refer the investigation of the complaint to another appropriate official, including himself/herself. This will particularly be the case if the

complainant perceives the investigating person to be inappropriate, or the complaint is about conduct of that person. The investigating person has responsibility for:

- Investigating the complaint thoroughly
- Responding to the complainant
- Ensuring that an accurate record of the nature and progress of the complaint is kept.

Investigating the complaint

Firstly, the person appointed as responsible will investigate the complaint. This should involve finding out what happened, why it happened and what can be done now. It may involve talking to instructors or other persons, looking at files and records, checking whether policies and procedures were followed or were inadequate, and drafting a response to the complainant.

This response should address the points raised by the complaint. It will explain whether or not COOD felt the complaint to be justified or not. It will detail what investigation was undertaken and the outcome of this. The response should also detail any remedial action to be taken by COOD and offer an apology where appropriate.

Satisfaction

At each stage in the process, the person responding to the complainant should ask them to state whether or not they are satisfied with the response to their complaint. They should advise the complainant of the next stage in the procedure if they are not satisfied and wish to take the complaint further.

Stage 2 – Manager Level (Chair)

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response at Stage 1, they should then submit a Stage 2 complaint, which will be responded to by the Chair.

The complaint should be made in writing to the Chair.

The registration of a complaint at this level will be acknowledged by correspondence.

It will then be the responsibility of the Chair to investigate the complaint and respond.

The Chair must inform any Instructors, volunteers, or trustees who are involved in the complaint that the complaint has progressed to Stage 2 as soon as possible.

In investigating the complaint and responding to the complainant, the Chair should consider whether an apology is required, remedial action is necessary, any reprimand or disciplinary action may be necessary against any instructor, Trustee or volunteer, and whether any changes need to be made to COODs' policies, practices and procedures.

Stage 3 – Complaints Panel

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response at stage 2, they should submit a Stage 3 complaint. This should be in writing and addressed to the Chair of COOD.

A complaints panel will be established, to which the complainant will be invited.

The complaints panel will consist of three nominated trustees.

The complainant may bring a friend or supporter to help them put their case.

The role of the Chair is to ensure that the complaint is fully re-investigated, and the response is not just a reproduction of previous responses.

When the Panel has discussed the complaint, they will respond to the complainant..

If the complainant is still not satisfied with the outcome, they are within their rights to contact the Charity Commission for further investigation.

Part three – A complaint received about a third-party voluntary organisation

On occasion COOD may receive a complaint about a third-party organisation, e.g. climbing wall staff or concerns about the facility. Any staff, instructor, trustee or volunteer receiving a complaint about another organisation should notify the COOD Chair. The Chair will, in consultation with managers and other staff, decide how to respond to the complaint and if any action is required.

COOD's Chair may decide to suspend using services to, or stop working with, the third-party organisation until satisfied any concerns have been resolved. Should this happen the organisation concerned will be provided with an explanation and offered a meeting to discuss the concerns raised.

Monitoring of complaints:

The Chair should regularly inform the Board of COOD of the number, nature and outcome of any complaints.