



South London Botanical Institute
Complaints Handling Policy (version 4.11.21)

1 General Statement

The South London Botanical Institute (SLBI) aims to provide its members, volunteers, visitors, other individuals and organisations with the best possible service. We positively welcome suggestions on how we can improve our service.

We treat as a complaint any expression of dissatisfaction with our service which calls for a response. We listen to your complaints, treat them seriously, and learn from them so that we can continuously improve our service.

The complaints handling policy covers complaints about the activities and services that South London Botanical Institute provides, and complaints about the staff, trustees and volunteers involved in delivering those activities and services. Complaints regarding discrimination and victimisation will also be investigated under the complaints handling procedure.

As far as possible, all complaints will be kept confidential to the parties concerned unless a concern is raised in relation to a safeguarding matter or in relation to serious criminality, in which case we reserve the right to escalate the matter to relevant authorities. However, the complaint will normally be made known to the Safeguarding Lead – currently the Chair or co-Chair of Trustees. Once the outcome is known, they may discuss the matter with the SLBI Board of Trustees – for example, if a change of policy or procedures is needed.

A confidential record of the complaint will be made and retained in compliance with GDPR requirements. This helps us assess how we have dealt with complaints and also to see if repeated complaints are made about the same person or issue.

Investigating your complaint at any stage may include meetings. If you attend a meeting, you have the right to be accompanied by a friend or advocate to help put your case. SLBI also has the right to have an advisor present.

The SLBI's Complaints Handling Policy will be publicised to organisations and individuals who use its services.

Please note that SLBI staff should follow the Grievance Procedure (issued to them on appointment) if they have cause for complaint, rather than this Complaints Handling Policy.

This policy will be reviewed every 2 years.

2 Courtesy and respect

You can expect to be treated with courtesy, respect and fairness at all times. We expect that you will also treat our staff dealing with your complaint with the same courtesy, respect and

fairness. If you do not, we may not be able to accept your complaint (see point 5 of Aims, below).

3 Aims

The SLBI is committed to providing an inclusive environment and high-quality services. One of the ways in which we can continue to improve our service is by listening and responding to the views of SLBI members, participants, members of the public, other organisations or others who may want to comment. Therefore, we aim to ensure that:

1. Making a complaint is as easy and transparent as possible.
2. That we deal with complaints appropriately and within the agreed time frame.
3. We treat a complaint as any clear expression of dissatisfaction with our service, or organisation as a whole, which calls for a response.
4. We respond in the right way – for example, with an explanation or an apology where we have got things wrong and if relevant and appropriate information on any action taken.
5. We have the right to refuse to accept a complaint where the complaint is clearly vexatious, malicious or motivated by racist, sexist, homophobic or other discriminatory attitudes, or where the complaint threatens or abuses SLBI staff/volunteers. The decision as to whether a complaint is vexatious will be taken by Chair or co-Chair. The SLBI defines a vexatious complainant as someone who persists in making a complaint or demand when all reasonable attempts to resolve their concerns have been made.
6. We have the right to refuse to accept a complaint in the unlikely circumstances that the complainant becomes verbally or physically abusive.
7. When a complaint identifies that something has gone wrong or has fallen below standards it is seen as an opportunity to improve and avoid a recurrence and it can allow for systems, policies, practices or procedures to be amended or put in place as appropriate.
8. This policy is designed to provide a positive response to complaints and comments, and ensure that the SLBI is open about the improvements that we have made as a result of feedback.

4 How to make a complaint

If you have a complaint, we would like you to tell us about it using the steps below.

Informal complaints

Many complaints arise from misunderstanding. The need for complaints can often be avoided if there is good, ongoing communication between staff, volunteers and participants. Usually, a word with the person concerned or the event leader at the time of service delivery or with the Education & Project Manager will suffice if a problem arises.

However, we recognise that there may be occasions when users of our services feel that the quality or level of service provided fall short of what they could reasonably expect, or the initial approach has failed. We want to know about these occasions so that we can make good the problem and plan to avoid its repetition.

Please raise your matter informally in the first instance with the event leader (in the case of public events) or line manager (in the case of volunteers), who will attempt to resolve the issue informally and immediately. This can be done verbally or in writing.

If the event organiser or line manager cannot resolve your complaint, they will pass on to the Education & Project Manager, who will try to resolve it. The Education & Project Manager may discuss the matter confidentially with their line manager or another trustee.

The informal complaint will be recorded along with the resolution or lack of it, and any further action taken or needed. Any records kept will be compliant with GDPR requirements.

Formal Complaints

If you are still not satisfied, your complaint should be made formally, usually by letter or email, to the Chair of the Trustees, who will designate a Trustee to deal with the complaint. We aim to acknowledge your complaint within 14 days. The designated Trustee will investigate and try to resolve your complaint within a further 14 days and will let you know the outcome in writing.

If you are still dissatisfied after raising it with the designated Trustee, you have the right of appeal.

The formal complaint will be recorded along with any investigation undertaken and the resolution or lack of it, and any further action taken or needed. Any records kept will be compliant with GDPR requirements.

Appeals

Your appeal should be made in writing, marked "Private & Confidential", and sent to the Chair of Trustees at the SLBI, 323 Norwood Road, London SE24 9AQ. Appeals should be made within 30 days of the outcome of the complaints. The Chair will acknowledge it in writing (normally within 14 days of receipt). Remember to keep a copy of your letter. If you need an interpreter or advocate to help you make your complaint, you will need to arrange this yourself.

The Chair of Trustees will investigate the complaint, in consultation with another designated trustee, constituting the Appeal Panel

We will keep notes of any meetings or telephone discussions.

The Chair will communicate the results of the investigation to you within a reasonable time (normally 21 days)

The decision of the Appeal Panel will be final.

All formal complaints, the response, other communications and discussions will be recorded and filed in a secure place.

5 Afterwards

If your complaint is upheld, there might be one or more of the following outcomes:

- An explanation or an apology where we have got things wrong and if relevant and appropriate information on any action taken.
- Specific improvements to the way we do things, which will be implemented within a reasonable time-frame.
- Parties coming together to mediate the dispute
- Recommendations for staff, volunteer or trustee training
- The Trustees will be informed by the Chair at the first available meeting of the number and nature of any formal complaints and their outcome, and consideration will be given to the implications these have for the planning and management of future services annually, as part of SLBI's self-evaluation

6 Time limits on making a complaint

Normally complaints should be made within six months of the event or within six months of the complainant becoming aware of cause to complain, subject to an overall limit of 12 months from the event. Exceptions to this rule may be made by the Education & Project Manager in discussion with the Chair of Trustees, and taking into account reasons for the delay and the practicability of investigating the matter.

Signed on behalf of SLBI Trustees:

Name: Michael Clarke

Date: 4.11.21

Date for next review: 4.11.23