



## **Complaints Policy and Process**

### **Introductions**

Nobody likes receiving complaints but when things aren't right, we want to know. If you think something is wrong, please tell us so we can make it right.

People who are responsible for getting things right at North Meets South should know about the Complaints Policy and be willing and able to provide you with a copy upon request.

### **What the Complaints Process Does and Does Not Cover**

The process applies to any complaints about North Meets South staff, steering group members, volunteers and the actions of these people when acting in a North Meets South capacity.

It does not apply to the actions of people acting in their own time in ways that do not affect North Meets South.

Neither does it apply to the actions of staff, trustees or volunteers of independent organisations that have their own complaints procedures, even if they are operating in partnership with North Meets South. In these cases, complaints should go directly to the organisations concerned.

### **Who's Who?**

It's usually best to ask the North Meets South Coordinator who is who, but the following gives a useful guide.

**The Complainant:** The person making a complaint.

**The Coordinator:** A paid worker, (often the only one) representing North Meets South to outside organisations and individuals. The current coordinator is \_\_\_\_\_ available at \_\_\_\_\_

**Crest:** The organisation which employs the Coordinator. The current representative is \_\_\_\_\_ available at \_\_\_\_\_

**The Steering Group** A group of individuals who are unpaid but meet regularly to give a steer to the Coordinator and the work of North Meets South.

**The (Rolling) Chair.** An unpaid officer of the Steering Group, who takes a lead on dealing with some aspects of the complaints policy. As the Chair is not in a paid role, s/he does not have a work address but can be contacted via the Coordinator, after phases one and two of the complaints process.

## The Complaints Process

This section describes the process for raising a complaint and explains how it should be managed.

### Phase One: The Informal Comment

If you are the complainant, you should start by going to the person responsible for the issue you want to complain about or comment on.

In many cases he/she will be able to sort out any problems there and then. This is usually the method we prefer as an instant response often prevents issues escalating. If you are satisfied with his/her response, the matter will be closed as soon as the response has been carried out. If not, go to phase two.

### Phase Two: Taking It Higher

Tell the Coordinator about your concern. S/he may be able to explain any misunderstandings or discuss options with you, and may offer to speak to the person you are complaining about, or carry out other investigations on your behalf. S/he should also commit to letting you know the result of any follow up. The Coordinator should give you and the Vice Chair a written summary of your meeting within five working days of it occurring and an update on any follow ups, within ten working days of your meeting.

If you are satisfied with the response, the matter will be closed as soon as any follow up actions have been carried out.

If you are not satisfied, you can ask the Coordinator to inform the Vice Chair and to record this request in the written summary of the meeting.

### Phase Three

The Vice Chair should contact you and offer to meet you, within ten working days of the Coordinator's written summary being received. The longer time period allows for the fact that the Vice Chair is working on an unpaid basis and may have other commitments outside of work, and for the fact that s/he may want to make further enquiries. It is up to the Vice Chair if s/he chooses to involve other people in the meeting, and/or to talk to them before meeting you.

It will be normal to invite a representative of Crest, if the Vice Chair judges that the Coordinator's employers need to be involved. After meeting you, the Vice Chair should write a summary of your concern, his or her understanding of the situation, how it is intended to resolve the matter, when by and who by. S/he should give you a written summary of the meeting within ten working days of meeting, which is deemed sufficient for gathering any additional evidence which is required.

S/he should also give a copy to North Meets South's Coordinator or, if the complaint is about the Coordinator, the Vice Chair should give a copy to the Crest representative.

The Vice Chair is authorised to recommend disciplinary proceedings to Crest, offer an apology on behalf of North Meets South, propose changes in the way things are organised, offer up to £100 in compensation from North Meets South and/or recommend financial compensation at higher levels. S/he does not have to do any of these things, but they are options. Crest and the Steering Group of North Meets South would have to endorse or reject any recommendations for payment of more than £100 and any recommendations of disciplinary action.

### Timescales

To ensure that timescales are complied with, all parties are advised to e-mail their concerns, send them by recorded post or ask for a signature upon receipt of a hand delivered copy. These methods will create a record of the relevant date.

### Right of Appeal

As the process already involves a series of escalating steps, there is no further right of appeal.

### Vexatious Complaints

It is possible for a single person or group of people to make persistent complaints that are based on spite, personal vendettas, race, gender or other inappropriate factors. These are known as vexatious complaints. If the Vice Chair believes a complaint is vexatious, then he/she can suspend the complaints process at any stage. He/she must then give a summary of the case at the next Steering Group Meeting. The Steering Group will decide whether the complaint proceedings should be reinstated or not.

### Review

It is the responsibility of the Coordinator to ensure that a Steering Group member reviews the effectiveness of this policy at least once every two years.

Date of Last Review: 25 April 2019

Person Reviewing: North Meets South Steering Group

Date for next review: By Jan 2021

Person reviewing: