COMPLAINTS
POLICY AND PROCEDURE

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Complaints policy & procedure

Cruse Scotland strives to ensure that its services, staff and volunteers offer the very highest quality experience to our clients, customers and communities. We acknowledge that occasionally we are not able to meet expectations and that sometimes things go wrong.

This procedure is a simple framework within which all complaints from clients, third parties, other organisations, representatives and members of the public are quickly, fairly and effectively dealt with in a clear and transparent manner. This can include complaints about the service that has been offered and/or provided, as well as a complaint concerning Cruse Scotland's fundraising practice. Internal issues between volunteers are dealt with through the Dignity at Work Policy.

A complaint is an issue raised by a party external to Cruse Scotland, about a volunteer, staff member or about something relating to the organisation. We are an organisational member of Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland (COSCA) therefore if the complaint is with regards to a client's counselling experience, we will follow COSCA's Complaints Procedure (Details on page 8).

Aims and principles of addressing a complaint

Cruse Scotland aims to provide a consistent approach to complaints and encourage organisational learning. This process follows the following underlying principles:

- Openness and accessibility
- Fairness and transparency
- Responsiveness
- A commitment to continuous improvement
- Independence from vested interests

Cruse Scotland intends to resolve each complaint at the earliest stage and informally, if possible, with a view to fostering positive relationships with all parties.

Cruse Scotland is unable to respond to anonymous complaints but will investigate and act where possible/appropriate.

Cruse Scotland's complaints procedure

Everyone making a complaint will be given access to the leaflet 'How to make a complaint about Cruse Scotland', which outlines the process to be followed and our obligation to respond to the complaint.

Complaints can be made in several ways. All complaints will be fully considered by Cruse Scotland and followed up appropriately. Where possible, the complaint will be dealt with through the client's preferred channel (phone, email, post, face to face). The time limit for

complaints to be accepted and investigated is a maximum of 3 years following the date of the alleged issue.

The complainant needs to be aware that any information shared with Cruse Scotland will need to be shared with any Cruse Scotland parties involved in the complaint process, including any people who face allegations indicated within the given complaint. This will need to be agreed to by the complainant prior to any complaint being taken forward by Cruse Scotland. Without this agreement, a complaint cannot be pursued.

If a client cannot put their complaint in writing, we will offer assistance. We will also ensure that help and advice on the complaints' procedure is available internally through the Head of Client Services. A client may also contact their local Citizens' Advice Bureau or local Advocacy Services. We can pass on information regarding these through our local Area offices or through our Headquarters in Perth.

If a complaint proves to be brought without valid evidence to support or is intended to do harm the complaints procedure will be stopped by the Head of Client Services and the complainant notified in writing.

All parties involved in the complaint should declare any conflict of interest to the Head of Client Services who will be responsible for assessing and dealing with that conflict.

Cruse Scotland has the right to seek legal or other specialist advice (e.g. COSCA) if it becomes necessary to do so.

Stage 1 – Informal discussion

Every effort should be made by all Cruse Scotland volunteers and staff to resolve complaints locally and informally wherever possible and appropriate. This includes listening and understanding the complaint, acknowledging the importance of the complaint, and responding appropriately.

This is the best practice in complaints' handling, to address and resolve matters as close to the source of the complaint as possible. Issues may be more able to be worked through informally and amicably.This may include concerns about

waiting times for services or problems that arise when clients referred to Cruse Scotland are expecting a service that Cruse Scotland does not deliver. Often, an apology and an explanation of expected service standards and/or difficulties in providing an expected level of service will be sufficient to resolve a complaint at this initial stage.

The local Area/Helpline Manager is responsible for the resolution of any complaints at this stage. The Area/Helpline Manager will make an initial assessment and if the complaint is considered to be of a serious nature (e.g. safeguarding) they can escalate it to Stage 2. If the Area/Helpline Manager is the subject of the complaint, then the Head of Client Services will nominate another individual to resolve the complaint. This can be another Area Manager.

A complaint at Stage 1 should be resolved within 10 working days. If this is not the case, we will explain in writing why this has not been possible.

If it is not possible to resolve a complaint at Stage 1, then the complainant will be advised that the complaint is to be dealt with formally (Stage 2), directing this to the Head of Client Services (contact details on Page 8). This can be submitted in writing, or the Area/Helpline Manager can take a written record of a verbal statement from the complainant and send this to them for confirmation that the complaint is accurately represented.

Stage 2 – Formal complaint

Once a formal complaint has been received, the Head of Client Services will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 5 working days and designate an appropriate, independent and impartial person to explore and gather facts. The investigating officer will speak with the complainant, clarify the specifics of the complaint, assess why the complainant remains dissatisfied, what resolution is being sought, investigate matters and interviews other parties as appropriate. The evidence will be heard separately from each party and all parties have the right to be accompanied by a representative or supporting person.

A written report is then completed by the investigating officer and presented to the Head of Client Services, who will make the decision as to whether the complaint is upheld or not, and what action may need to be taken following this. Depending on the nature of the complaint any conclusions reached will be in accordance with our Staff Handbook and Volunteer Policy. Possible outcomes could be an apology, further training or no longer providing services for Cruse Scotland.

A letter based on this report will be sent to the complainant including the outcome and any recommendations within 20 working days of receipt of the formal Stage 2 complaint. The Head of Client Services will also communicate with other parties who are subject to or involved in the complaint.

If the problem cannot be satisfactorily resolved, Stage 3 should be followed.

Stage 3 – Appeal stage

The complainant may wish to appeal against the decision if they are dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint. This appeal needs to be communicated in writing within 10 working days of receipt of the outcome to the Chief Executive Officer. At least one of the following grounds must be fulfilled:

- The decision was unduly influenced by people partial to the person complained about
- The decision was made against the weight of evidence
- All the evidence was not considered
- The correct procedure to undertake a resolution of the issue was not followed.

If one or more of the above grounds are fulfilled, then the Chief Executive Officer will carry out the appeal. This will be acknowledged within 5 working days. The Chief Executive Officer will then set up a panel of three: two members of the Cruse Scotland Board and an external,

appropriate, independent and impartial person with relevant experience. No person who has previous involvement in the investigation will be involved at this stage.

All documentation relating to the appeal will be copied to all parties and the panel members 10 working days before the hearing.

A person representing the person who has made the complaint and the person about whom the complaint has been made may be asked to attend the hearing separately. They may be accompanied and/or represented by a supportive person. All parties will be notified of the outcome within 30 working days of receipt of the appeal request.

(A Report at the Conclusion of Complaints Proceedings will be sent within 28 days to COSCA if the complaint regards our counselling services. COSCA will publish upheld complaints and their sanctions regarding COSCA Individual Members of Member Organisations.)

If the complainant is still dissatisfied with the outcome, they can contact COSCA through its complaints procedure within one month of the appeal decision. (Contact details on Page 8). On receipt COSCA will verify that the organisation's complaints procedure has been followed, and the outcome was lawful, reasonable and properly explained.

If the complaint is regarding any of our other services, the outcome and decision of the Stage 3 appeal is final.

Misconduct

If there is concern that a volunteer or staff member may have behaved in a way that constitutes serious misconduct a senior member of staff will immediately investigate the matter. A suitable member of staff will be allocated to investigate by the Head of Client Services.

This action will be dealt with under the Volunteer Procedure or the Staff Disciplinary Procedure (as relevant), and not the Complaints Procedure. If any further proceedings delay the conclusion of the complaints policy the complainant will be informed in writing.

Exercising discretion

The Lead Investigating Officer can at any point exercise discretion to:

- Move an informal complaint to a formal stage (e.g. such as if the informal interaction raises considerable concerns about the operations of a local service)
- Assign another staff member as the investigating officer
- Delay or postpone the process with due regard to time restraints and confidentiality in certain circumstances e.g. should it emerge that legal action is under way, pending or intended, until any legal process is complete. The process will re-start at the point at which it was stopped and within a reasonable time.

- Discontinue the process if the person making the complaint fails or refuses to participate at any stage of the complaint procedure without good reason or formally withdraws the complaint. Both parties will be informed.

Related complaints

If a complaint relates to a staff member or contractor providing services on behalf of Cruse Scotland, which is unrelated to client services, this will be led by their line manager. This includes a complaint which relates to the Head of Client Services and Chief Executive Officer

Complaints about Trustees, concerning their volunteering in such capacities, should be coordinated by the Chair of each committee. The Chair may assign an officer of the committee to investigate the complaint, or they may do so themselves. In the case of a complaint being received about the Chair of

Trustees, two other Trustees will be designated to investigate the complaint, by the Board of Trustees (excluding the Chair in this case).

If a complaint is made against someone who has left the organisation an investigation may be conducted for the learning of the organisation and wherever possible the person against whom the complaint is made will be offered the opportunity to represent their own interest. An outcome report will be sent to COSCA who may investigate if the person against whom the complaint is made is still a member of COSCA under the system of dealing with information about members.

Complaints about trainers

Occasionally someone may express dissatisfaction about a contracted trainer of Cruse Scotland who is providing training to other organisations. We take such complaints seriously and we will assign the Volunteer Development Manager to assess the complaint and follow the complaints procedure.

Complaints concerning fundraising

If someone wishes to complain about an aspect of fundraising that Cruse Scotland has undertaken, they can do so using this procedure. Cruse Scotland is compliant with the Fundraising Regulations, and if someone feels that Cruse Scotland has not abided by these, then a complaint can be lodged here: Scottish Fundraising Standards Panel (goodfundraising.scot)

Anyone can indicate that they do not wish to receive any donation requests from Cruse Scotland, in which case they can inform us or subscribe to the Mail Preference Service, which will instruct Cruse Scotland to stop making any requests for donation from that individual. Details can be found on www.mpsonline.org.uk

Keeping confidentiality

People involved in a complaint – including anyone who faces allegations as part of the complaint, and anyone involved who is providing details for the investigation – should not disclose any information about the complaint to any party inside or outside of Cruse Scotland.

For staff in Cruse Scotland, doing so will be treated as a case of gross misconduct. In the case of a volunteer this will be considered as a very serious issue and will be dealt with through the Volunteer Policy.

Guidance should be sought from the Chief Executive Officer or Head of Client Services if there are any queries in this regard.

How to make a complaint

In writing, to:

Doreen Miller
Head of Client Services
29 Barossa Place
Perth
PH1 5HH

Send an email:
Fiona Arnott-Barron, Chief Executive Officer
fiona.arnott-barron@crusescotland.org.uk

Doreen Miller, Head of Client Services:
doreen.miller@crusescotland.org.uk

By telephone: 01738 444178

COSCA
Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland

COSCA

Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland, 16 Melville Terrace, Stirling FK8 2NE
Tel: 01786 475140,
Email: info@cosca.org.uk
Website: www.cosca.org.uk
Complaints - General Information :: COSCA - Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland

The Complaints Procedure is in addition to, not a replacement for any legal rights

Changes sheet

Date	Change Details	Author
22.04.2021	Re-write of previous policy dated 3/7/2015. COSCA approved 22-4-21.	Wendy Diack
18.08.2021	V1.0 Final version. Updated with suggested changes from Executive Board Meeting on 4-6-2021, approved by PG&T.	Wendy Diack
06.10.2021	V1.1 Review & update - Stage 1 should be resolved within 10 working days instead of 14 days (Page 4) for consistency of timings.	Wendy Diack
08.11.2022	V1.2 Change contact details from Chief Operating Officer to Director of Client Services. Updated logo.	Wendy Diack
15.01.2025	V1.3 Added Cosca Logo, replaced instances of previous CBCS Title with 'Cruse Scotland'. Updated 'Training Manager' full title. -Retitled section 'Non-client related complaints' -Reworded to include Area Manager/Helpline, removed sentence which outlined separate complaint procedure for Helpline' -Added email addresses for CEO and Director of Client Services on 'How to Make a Complaint'	Ed Strutt Nicola Reed
25.07.2025	Reformatted document to 2025 house style	Ed Strutt
11.11.2026	Changed Head of Client Services details to Doreen Miller.	David Coates