

# **Non-Religious Pastoral Support Network Complaints Procedure**

Members of the network must adhere to the NRPSN Handbook, including the Code of Conduct, which exists to protect the professionalism and integrity of the network as a whole and of its individual members, and of the NRPSN.

This document details the procedure by which complaints about network members may be brought and will be handled. It is understood that all complaints will be handled as swiftly as possible to avoid or minimise damage to the reputation, integrity, and self-esteem of the individuals concerned, of the network and of the NRPSN. During all stages of the complaints procedure, all parties will have regard to the NRPSN Handbook, including the Code of Conduct, will maintain confidentiality, and will observe generally accepted moral and ethical codes of behaviour.

It is to be expected that the majority of complaints raised about a network member will be made to the institution in which they are working, and this complaints procedure has been drawn up with that in mind. It is hoped that the institution would inform the NRPSN of the outcome of any complaint, should it be serious, and the NRPSN will then take appropriate action. However, it is also possible for a complaint to be made directly to the NRPSN.

Complaints may come from colleagues, including fellow network members, from an institution, from someone to whom pastoral support has been provided, from Humanists UK staff, or from a member of the public who has had contact with the person complained about in their capacity as an accredited member of the NRPSN.

Complaints may be broached informally by telephone or in person by individuals or groups. For action to be taken they must be expressed formally, in writing to the Director Humanist Care, who is the administrator of this Complaints Procedure.

A written complaint should include full details and relevant facts including names, dates, times and places, wherever possible, as the details of the matter will be presented to the person complained about for their response.

## **Stage 1: A complaint is made**

### **Scenario 1: Complaints received from an institution**

If an institution (e.g. prison or hospital) complains about a network member working in that institution, the Director of Humanist Care will log the complaint (date, contact details, and details of the allegations).

The Director of Humanist Care will establish whether the institution has carried out its own investigation into the complaint and if so, what the findings and results were. The Director of Humanist Care will check that the institution has made the network member aware of the complaint, the institution's investigation, and its findings. (Where the institution has not made the network member aware of the situation the NRPSN will

strongly encourage the institution to do so. The institution has the prime responsibility to investigate complaints and follow its own internal complaints procedures.)

The Director of Humanist Care will inform the network member that they have received a complaint from the institution and whether the network or the institution is handling the complaint. (This is to avoid parallel or duplicate complaint procedures being carried out). If it is the institution handling the complaint, the network member will be told that the NRPSN's action will depend on the outcome of the institution's investigations as in scenario 4 below. If the NRPSN is handling the complaint it will follow the procedure starting with STAGE TWO (below).

### **Scenario 2: Complaint received from individual outside of the NRPSN**

When an individual complains about a network member in an institution. The Director of Humanist Care will log the complaint (date, contact details etc) and details of the complaint/ allegations made.

The administrator will ask the individual complainant if they have informed the institution. Where the individual has not informed the institution they should *normally* be encouraged to do so. Unless the individual specifically asks that the institution is not informed the Director of Humanist Care will proceed on the basis that the NRPSN will, in due course, inform the institution. **This needs to be made clear to the individual.**

Before contacting the institution, the Director of Humanist Care will inform the network member that a complaint has been received. They will tell the network member that the NRPSN intends to inform the relevant institution and that it will ask the institution if it wishes to take responsibility for handling the complaint. The Director of Humanist Care will inform the institution and agree who will handle the complaint (normally the institution). The Director of Humanist Care will inform the network member about who is to handle the complaint. If the NRPSN is to handle the complaint, then it will follow the procedure starting with STAGE 2 below.

### **Scenario 3: Complaint received from a member of the NRPSN**

When a complaint is received from another member of the network or a member of Humanists UK staff. The Director of Humanist Care will log the complaint (date, contact details etc) and details of the complaint/ allegations made. The Director of Humanist Care will inform the volunteer that a complaint has been made and will then follow the procedure starting with STAGE 2 below.

### **Scenario 4: Complaint handled by an institution and the NRPSN informed of the outcome**

In all cases where an institution has handled a complaint the NRPSN will act in line with the institution's decisions and actions. If the institution dismisses the network member, then the NRPSN will inform the member that their accreditation has been suspended pending a subsequent investigation by the Director of Humanist Care and the NRPSN Quality Assurance Officer. If it is concluded that the institution has acted fairly, then the member will be informed and their accreditation withdrawn. If it is deemed that the

institution has acted unfairly then the Director of Humanist Care will inform the institution of the NRPSN investigation outcomes. The Director of Humanist Care will then work with the member to appeal the institution's decision, by providing details of the networks investigation outcomes.

*Appeal: The member may appeal to the Chair of the NRPSN Board*

## **STAGE 2: The complaint is classified**

The administrator will immediately inform the complainant of the NRPSN complaints procedure.

The administrator will discuss the complaint with the Quality Assurance Officer, the complainant, and the person being complained about as to the facts of the matter in order to, within ten working days, classify the complaint according to the following categories:

**Category 1: Minor mistakes or misunderstandings**, that can be satisfactorily explained to the complainant's satisfaction;

**Category 2: Breaches of the NRPSN Handbook (including the Code of Conduct), or an equivalent document issued by the institution handling the complaint**, which have caused distress to those receiving pastoral support, or compromised other volunteers or fellow professionals and which can be attributed to inaction or neglect on the part of the volunteer;

**Category 3: Major breach or failure of the Code of Conduct.** This can be either a single, serious mistake (such as manipulating or exploiting others) or a series of failings or mistakes over a period of time which cause colleagues, those supported, or fellow volunteers a serious loss of confidence, a sense of being seriously compromised, or material loss;

**Category 4: Complaints about the conduct of NRPSN staff (including associated Humanists UK staff);**

**Category 5: Complaints about a member of the NRPSN Board.**

## **STAGE 3: The complaint is handled**

**Category 1:** Within two working days of the complaint being classified, the Director of Humanist Care will contact the member about whom the complaint has been made, explaining its substance and nature and, following discussions, will decide what action, if any, is necessary. If action is deemed necessary, it may take the form of a written apology from the network member concerned to the complainant and a note will be made on the member's file, copied to the member. If no further complaints are made, this note will be deleted after one year. Where a complaint is found to be unsubstantiated or unfounded, this will be formally notified to the network member as well as the complainant. In this case, no note will be recorded.

*Appeal: The member may appeal to the Chair of the NRPSN Board*

**Category 2:** Within two working days of the complaint being classified, the Director of Humanist Care will contact in writing the member about whom the complaint has been made, explaining its substance and nature and request a written response. The Director of Humanist Care will consider the case with the NRPSN Quality Assurance Officer. If it is decided that there is a case to answer, the Director of Humanist Care and the Quality Assurance Officer will invite the member to discuss the issues at a meeting. The member may be accompanied at this meeting by a colleague or friend. If necessary, the Director of Humanist Care may seek information, guidance, opinion and advice from staff, a trainer, mentor or another as appropriate. Any such meeting must be minuted and copies given to all present afterwards. Following this meeting, the Director of Humanist Care and the Quality Assurance Officer will decide whether to uphold the complaint, decide what action - if any - is needed, and communicate this clearly to the network member concerned.

Where a complaint is upheld, actions will depend on the seriousness of the breach. It may require a period of re-training or of working with a trained mentor. It may also be appropriate for a limited suspension from pastoral support work to enable the network member to consider their work/life balance or to recover from a period of stress or ill health which, it is considered, may have led to the problem under discussion. It may result in the permanent withdrawal of accreditation. The member must comply with any recommended actions and assistance offered and a note will be made on the member's file, copied to the member. Failure to comply may lead permanent withdrawal of accreditation. If no further complaints are received within two years, this note will be deleted. Where a complaint is not upheld, no note will be recorded.

*Appeal: The member may appeal to the Chair of the NRPSN Board*

**Category 3:** Within two working days of the complaint being classified, the Director of Humanist Care will contact in writing the member about whom the complaint was made, explaining its substance and nature and stating that a meeting between the Director of Humanist Care, the Quality Assurance Officer and one other Board member will be convened to consider the case. The member will be invited to attend this meeting and may be accompanied by a colleague or friend. The meeting will be minuted and copies given to all present afterwards. If necessary, the Director of Humanist Care may seek information, guidance, opinion and advice from the volunteer training staff, a trainer, mentor or another as appropriate.

Following this meeting, the Quality Assurance Officer, the Director of Humanist Care and the other board member will decide what action, if any, should be taken. The complainant will be notified of the decision by the Director of Humanist Care in an appropriate letter of explanation. Where a complaint is not upheld, no note of events will be recorded. If a complaint is upheld, subsequent action may involve withdrawal of the member accreditation or other remedial action depending on the nature and background of the case. Following remedial action, the member must report back to the Director of Humanist Care within the timescale set. Failure to do so may lead to further remedial action being taken. As with Category 2 complaints, it may be judged appropriate that a period of suspension will give the member time to rethink their work/life balance and recover from any stress or ill health which has contributed to the problems. Should it be decided that it is necessary to remove accreditation, appropriate

colleagues in the NRPSN and other appropriate professionals will be advised accordingly in the form of a simple statement.

*Appeal: The member may appeal to the Chair of the NRSPSN Board*

**Category 4:** Within two working days of being classified, complaints about the conduct of staff will be forwarded to the Assistant to the Chief Executive of the Humanists UK, for resolution under the Humanist UK's relevant disciplinary procedures for staff and volunteers.

**Category 5:** Within two days of being classified, complaints should be made in writing to the Chief Executive of the Humanists UK who will consider them against the Byelaws and any other rules governing the conduct of NRPSN, individually and collectively, and against reasonable standards of propriety. If those complained about are deemed to have acted out with or against those rules, they may be removed or asked to resign their positions.

*Appeal: The Board member may appeal to the Chair of Trustees of the Humanists UK*