

# Royal Society of Chemistry

## Volunteer Problem Solving Policy and Procedure

### Policy Statement

**The Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) values and respects its volunteers and is grateful for their invaluable support.**

Volunteering is deeply embedded in the culture of the RSC and is vital to delivering our chartered objectives. Thousands of volunteers each year dedicate their time and expertise to be involved in RSC activity. The decision to involve members and individuals as volunteers in different areas of work is informed by strategic choices of the RSC. Volunteers and volunteer activity must align with our collaborative efforts to deliver our strategic aims and therefore any volunteer role must be defined and agreed by the RSC.

The involvement of volunteers is usually a positive experience for everyone involved, however there may be times when an issue about a volunteer or volunteering needs to be addressed. It is important that there is a quick, fair and transparent process for doing so to:

- protect our volunteers and ensure that they are treated in a fair and equal way
- demonstrate that we respect our volunteers and are committed to good practice
- minimise any disruption to the charity's work and the people involved
- resolve any concerns quickly
- protect the reputation of the RSC

This policy sets out what happens when an issue is raised in relation to a volunteer, volunteer groups, a sub-set of a committee or an individual's volunteering experience. This includes the procedure for conflict resolution to manage matters arising between volunteers.

Should a volunteer wish to raise other issues about our products, services, policies or a member of staff, this should be done using our [Comments and Complaints Procedure](#).

### 1. Policy Purpose & Scope

- 1.1. This policy applies to all RSC volunteers however the procedure will be different for our Board of Trustees.
- 1.2. Where an issue is raised by a volunteer in relation to a member of staff this should be raised through our Comments and Complaints Procedure.
- 1.3. Where an individual has raised a concern or several concerns which, individually or collectively, could be classified under more than one of the RSCs policies, it may be decided to consider them all under the same policy.
- 1.4. When concerns raised have engaged more than one RSC policy, we may consider pausing one or more aspects to effectively manage the concerns. This may apply to a variety of scenarios including where safeguarding concerns have been raised alongside a complaint, where an issue may also relate to membership regulations and the RSC Code of Conduct, or where a concern relates to disagreements and disputes between volunteers.
- 1.5. The RSC has complete discretion to decide under which of its policies a concern should be considered and their decision in relation to this is final.
- 1.6. Volunteer/s will be informed of the management and governance roles and responsibilities of those involved in the process, with clarity on who is responsible for making decisions on behalf of the RSC.

## 2. General Principles

- 2.1. Issues should be raised as soon as possible after the problem occurs, as any delay may mean that an effective resolution cannot be achieved.
- 2.2. Issues will be dealt with fairly, constructively and consistently, ensuring investigations are facilitated and led by RSC staff and/or members with the appropriate level of skills, experience and independence to assess the information and make decisions.
- 2.3. The majority of issues should be resolved informally, reaching mutual agreement.
- 2.4. A volunteer with a concern raised about them will be able to offer an explanation before any decision is taken in relation to their role.
- 2.5. Everyone involved will be expected to agree, cooperate and adhere with the decisions reached through this procedure.
- 2.6. The wellbeing and mental health of all involved when dealing with an issue or expression of concern will be a consideration throughout the process but will not alter the key steps of the procedure that must be followed.
- 2.7. Where requested, we will endeavour to put reasonable adjustments in place to support individuals who need them.

## 3. What issues does the policy cover?

- 3.1. An issue may arise for a variety of reasons, whether about a volunteer's experience, or in relation to a volunteer. The problem solving policy may be applied for the following issues, but this list is not exhaustive:
  - Volunteers that are behaving in a manner incompatible with our [Volunteer Principles](#) and the [Professional Practice and Code of Conduct](#).
  - Acting in a way that might damage the RSC's reputation.
  - Not fulfilling, or acting outside of, their volunteer role.
  - Not following RSC policies and procedures, for example misuse of data.
  - Volunteers that have come into conflict with each other in a way that is damaging to delivery of activity, team culture and/or the wellbeing of individuals, and cannot be resolved independently.

## 4. Breach of RSC Code of Conduct and Criminal Activity

- 4.1. For allegations relating to a serious breach of the RSC Professional Practice and Code of Conduct please refer to the Disciplinary Regulations. The RSC reserves the right to refer a case to the relevant board for Disciplinary proceedings at any point in the process.
- 4.2. Allegations relating to criminal activity may, at any point, be referred directly to the police.

# Volunteer Problem Solving Procedure

## Introduction

This procedure applies to all RSC volunteer roles and has been developed with flexibility to account for the variations in management of individual schemes, ranging from activity managed by RSC staff through to schemes with governance and board-level oversight. The procedure is to be applied in a way that is both appropriate and proportionate to the course of action required, informed and defined by both management structures of the relevant volunteer activity and the nature of the concern.

This procedure sets out the informal and formal steps to address and resolve a problem in relation to one or more volunteers. In most instances it is fairer to the volunteer(s) to have received informal feedback and have opportunity to respond and agree a mutual way forward before escalation. Often mutual agreement can be reached informally, whereas formal procedures may be disproportionate to the original concern raised.

For the benefit of everyone involved, wherever possible we aim to support resolution through informal discussions. Where that fails, we will move forward with formal discussions.

## **1. Informal Discussions**

- 1.1. An issue can be discussed with the RSC staff contact at any time.
- 1.2. When the RSC becomes aware of an issue, the RSC staff contact should hold separate informal discussions with the complainant and the volunteer(s) to understand the issue and decide on an appropriate course of action.
- 1.3. The volunteer's RSC staff contact will work with the volunteer(s) in a supportive and constructive way to understand the circumstances, identify areas for improvement, and agree and review next steps.
- 1.4. If a concern or conflict cannot be resolved informally, the steps set out in the rest of this procedure should be followed.
- 1.5. The RSC reserves the right to decide when the formal process needs to be applied and their decision in relation to this is final.

## **2. Formal Discussions**

- 2.1. Where an issue has not been resolved informally, a formal process may be used to reach a resolution.
- 2.2. In exceptional circumstances a more formal approach will need to be taken straightaway, for example, when there are issues of safeguarding, allegations of assault and harassment, or conflict scenarios where at least one side is intransigent. This list is not exhaustive.
- 2.3. A complainant can submit their concerns in writing via the Volunteer Concern form available on request from their RSC staff contact or by contacting [volunteer@rsc.org](mailto:volunteer@rsc.org). All concerns must be described in the context of the Volunteer Principles and specify where there has been a breach of expectations or RSC policies and procedures.
- 2.4. Upon receiving a formal concern, a member of RSC staff will be appointed as Lead Manager to co-ordinate the formal steps within this procedure.
- 2.5. The Lead Manager will undertake a review of the concern and gather facts to determine the best course of action. In a conflict scenario the Lead Manager may invite the other party to submit information to include their perspective.
- 2.6. The volunteer(s) will be advised of the concern/s raised against them and given time to respond to the concerns.
- 2.7. In exceptional circumstances, where there is an unacceptable level of risk to individuals or the organisation, it may be necessary for a volunteer to be suspended whilst the issue is investigated.
- 2.8. Depending on the volunteer role and nature of the concern, after the review of information gathered through initial fact finding, the Lead Manager may decide that:
  - the concern has been resolved, and no further action is required.
  - the concern is referred to informal discussion for resolution.
  - the concern is referred to another RSC procedure.
  - a review meeting is held with the volunteer(s) – where the concern relates to more than one volunteer, or a conflict between volunteers, a separate review meeting may be held with each volunteer.

## **3. Review Meeting**

- 3.1. The review meeting is an opportunity for the volunteer to share context from their perspective and respond to concerns in person.

- 3.2. The Lead Manager will fix a date, time and place for the review meeting(s), this may be held in-person or online.
- 3.3. It is at the discretion of the RSC to determine whether the concern under consideration requires the convening of a member panel to undertake the review meeting. This will be informed by the nature of the concern and the governance of the volunteer role. Members appointed to take part in a panel will be selected for their independence in relation to the concern and have experience and skills relevant to the volunteer role.
- 3.4. A supporter may, if the volunteer wishes, accompany them to the meeting; this supporter could be a friend, family member, RSC member or colleague.
- 3.5. If the volunteer does not wish to attend, then a review meeting may still proceed without them, depending on the nature of the concern.
- 3.6. The Lead Manager will communicate by email the following information to the volunteer(s):
- the date (which will be at least 28 days from the date the notice is sent), time and place of the review meeting; (this timescale is to allow enough time for relevant information to be compiled and for all participants to prepare)
  - the statement of the concern and specifying how it contravenes the Volunteer Principles, according to the complainant;
  - an invitation to send a written response to the case to the Lead Manager no later than 14 prior to the date of the review meeting; and
  - an invitation to provide the Lead Manager a copy of any supporting information and evidence relevant to the concern that they wish to be considered no later than 14 days prior to the review meeting
  - a requirement to inform the Lead Manager no later than 7 days prior to the review meeting of the following: whether the volunteer intends to attend the review meeting; the names of any person or persons who will be accompanying the volunteer.
  - a notice that if the volunteer does not wish to appear at the review meeting then a discussion on the future of their role may be made in their absence.
  - A copy of this Policy will be enclosed with the notice of the review meeting.

#### 4. Outcome

- 4.1. Following the review meeting(s), the Lead Manager/Member Panel will reconvene to determine the outcome(s) of the concern.
- 4.2. The Lead Manager/Member Panel will conclude the following:
- The concern raised is unfounded.
  - The concern raised is founded but now resolved.
  - The concern raised is founded and an action plan is to be drawn up, which may include training, mediation, role adjustment and/or conditions for volunteer/s to stay in the role. Changes to be implemented with the support of the relevant member of staff or volunteer(s)
  - The concern raised is founded and the volunteer(s) should no longer continue in some or all of their current role or roles that may be time-bound and/or with conditions or indefinitely
- 4.3. The Lead Manager/Member Panel may also draw up recommendations for the RSC and volunteer activity based on learning and outcomes from the process.
- 4.4. The Lead Manager will communicate the outcome of the formal discussion to the volunteer(s) within 14 days of the review meeting. Flexibility may be applied where the concern involves more than one volunteer, if a complaint gives rise to a counter-complaint, and more than one review meeting is required.

## 5. Appeals

- 5.1. The volunteer may appeal against formal action taken in relation to them or their role under this Procedure.
- 5.2. Only one appeal is allowed per volunteer directly referenced in a concern and if multiple appeals raise the same concerns they may be carried out as one appeal.
- 5.3. The grounds of an appeal should be put in writing to the RSC within one week of receiving notification in writing of the outcome.
- 5.4. In the event of an appeal, either a Senior Manager will be appointed, or a Volunteer Appeal Panel will convene to consider the appeal and issue the decision in writing.
- 5.5. An appeal will only be considered on the grounds of:
  - procedural impropriety;
  - unreasonable decision or sanction; or
  - further significant evidence that could not reasonably have been made available during Formal Discussions.
- 5.6. The Senior Manager or Volunteer Appeal Panel will have the power to:
  - decide whether further evidence submitted is new evidence of significance which could not reasonably have been presented during Formal Discussions and, if so, to direct that the case be reheard by the Lead Manager or Member Panel in light of that new evidence;
  - cancel, or vary the action of the Lead Manager or Member Panel; or
  - dismiss the appeal.
- 5.7. Neither volunteer(s) nor any representative acting on behalf of the volunteer(s) will have a right of appearance before the Volunteer Appeal Panel.
- 5.8. The decision of the Senior Manager or Volunteer Appeal Panel will be confirmed to all parties within 14 days of the Panel meeting and will be final.
- 5.9. The decision of the Senior Manager or Volunteer Appeal Panel will be final.

## Annex A. Definitions

'Complainant' means the person or body by whom a concern has been formally raised

'Concern' means the escalation of a specific issue in relation to volunteer(s) and/or volunteering that contravenes the Volunteer Principles and cannot be resolved through informal discussion.

'Lead Manager' means a person who is appointed to co-ordinate and/or directly investigate the concern. This might be the manager of the staff team responsible for the volunteer activity, or might be an independently appointed manager, depending on circumstances.

'Member Panel' means a panel convened of members with experience relevant to the concern. This may be from, but is not limited to, the most relevant governance board or committee related to the concern.

'Relevant Board' means the board or committee with governance oversight of the volunteer programme or activity.

'RSC Staff contact' means the staff team or individual responsible for the delivery and management of the programme or activity involving the volunteer for whom a concern has been raised

'Senior Manager' means a manager of the department responsible for the volunteer activity or a manager holding the equivalent level of role at the RSC.

'Volunteer(s)' means the individual or group against whom a formal concern has been raised

'Volunteer Appeal Panel' means a panel convened by the Chair of the relevant board for the volunteer programme or activity.

## Version Control

We are committed to reviewing our policy and good practice biennially, or in the following circumstances:

- After a change in legislation and/or government guidance
- As a result of any significant change or event

Version Control			
Version	Author	Date	Changes
1.0	Magda van Leeuwen	March 2022	Final version
1.1	Magda van Leeuwen	September 2025	Edits to policy and procedures to clarify principles and procedural steps across a wider range of scenarios. Additional points added to clarify roles and responsibilities, timeframes and appeals process and conditions.

Document Control	
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