

Institute of Psychotherapy and Social Studies (IPSS)

Grievance Procedure

The purpose of this Grievance Procedure is to help IPSS members and trainee members (e.g., accreditation applicants) to resolve internal disputes or conflicts. This Grievance procedure differs from any Complaints Procedure in that it does not deal with psychotherapists' conduct in relation to the IPSS Code of Professional Conduct and Ethical Practice in Psychotherapy.

Grievances, as opposed to Code of Conduct complaints, are concerned with the rules and function of the organisation and the treatment and conduct of its members. An alleged significant failure of fair and reasonable behaviour constitutes the main grounds for raising a grievance.

This Grievance Procedure is internal to the IPSS and intended for members use only. It provides a structure and a process whereby grievances can be aired and resolved as quickly as possible and as near as possible to the point of origin.

Informal Resolutions

Where possible the informal route should be adopted: Where a member has a difficulty with another member(s), including IPSS office holders, or with an IPSS committee, including Council, the member should seek first discuss it directly with the person(s) concerned. If the difficulty remains unresolved or persists, the member may raise it as a grievance.

Where a member's grievance is unresolved after discussing it directly with those concerned or where the member does not feel able to approach those concerned directly without support, the member should raise the matter with the IPSS Chair of Ethics who will mediate. If the grievance concerns a committee, the member should raise it with the committee's Chair. If the grievance remains unresolved or persists, the member may also then take it up with the Chair of Ethics.

If the grievance is about the Chair of Ethics or the Chair of IPSS, it may not be appropriate to take up the grievance with that office holder directly and in this instance, the member may raise it informally with the other of the pair for mediation.

In the above circumstances Chair of Ethics (or Chair of IPSS) and the member(s) receiving the informal grievance will discuss with the member raising the grievance how best their grievance can be satisfactorily resolved, i.e., what outcome they may want and whether this is reasonable and agreeable.

If the grievance affects more than one member, each individual so affected should raise their grievance separately. Only with the agreement of the Chair of Ethics or,

where grievances are about the Chair of Ethics, the Chair of IPSS, can grievances be raised collectively and, even if this is agreed, the informal process may involve a separate discussion with each aggrieved party.

Formal Resolutions

If the member's grievance is not resolved through the informal route detailed above or the member considers the matter to be more serious than can be dealt with informally, they may raise it as a formal grievance, which must be set out in writing to the Chair of IPSS through the administrator. The person(s) or committee against whom the grievance is raised will be given a copy of the grievance (within one week where practicable).

If the grievance is about the Chair of IPSS or about an IPSS Council decision, the member(s) should set out in writing their grievance and send this to the Chair of Ethics through the administrator. The Chair of IPSS, or all members of Council, will be then given a copy of the grievance (within one week where practicable).

Formal meetings: It is the intention of IPSS to consider all grievances as soon as possible. However, members need to be mindful of the fact that IPSS is a small organization managed by volunteers and meetings may take longer to organize, especially during holiday periods or where more than one grievance is in process at any one time.

Investigation meeting. The Chair of IPSS in consultation with the Chair of Ethics will jointly identify and invite an existing independent IPSS member (of more than five years membership) to conduct the investigation of the grievance, or may consider it appropriate to appoint a willing external suitable professional to investigate. If either the Chair of IPSS or the Chair of Ethics is the subject of the grievance, their part in the process will become the responsibility of the Chair of Members.

An investigation meeting (face to face or on-line by agreement) will be held with the member who has raised the grievance within 28 days of receipt of the grievance wherever possible. At this meeting, the investigating officer will look to establish the facts of what has taken place to give rise to the grievance and what the member is looking for as a reasonable outcome/resolution. The investigating officer will always be accompanied by the administrator to take notes (and also act as witness), and the member raising the grievance is entitled to be accompanied by a fellow IPSS member if desired. The notes are to be written up within one week where possible and agreed with the investigating officer.

The investigating officer (and administrator) will also then arrange to meet as soon as practical with the member(s) against whom the grievance is raised, having supplied them in advance with a copy of the agreed investigation notes and invite the members(s) concerned to comment on any of these notes. Notes of this or these

meetings will also be written up within one week where possible and agreed with the investigating officer, who shall then produce a written summary with both (or all) sets of notes as appendices, along with any other written material relevant to the case. This will be the grievance file.

With the agreement of Council, appropriate remuneration may be made to the investigating officer.

Assessment of facts. Following a formal investigation, the investigating officer will refer the grievance file to an assessment panel. This panel will consist of the investigating officer themselves and two further independent IPSS members (of more than five years membership and not on Council) jointly identified by the Chair of IPSS and Chair of Ethics. If either the Chair of IPSS or the Chair of Ethics is the subject of the grievance, their part in the process will become the responsibility of the Chair of Members. The panel will appoint itself a Chair.

The assessment panel will assess all the facts of the case and determine whether there is a case to answer in respect of the said grievance, by considering whether the facts complained about would, if established, be sufficient to constitute a serious grievance on the grounds brought with the case.

The panel will aim to meet within 21 days of the receipt of the grievance file. A determination that there is a case to answer in respect of a formal grievance shall ideally be unanimous (though a majority is acceptable), written up, and referred promptly by the Panel Chair to the Chair of Ethics.

When the Chair of Ethics is informed by the panel of their determination, they will immediately notify in writing the two (or more) parties and the Chair of IPSS of their decision and the reasons behind it. This document will be added to the grievance file.

If the panel is satisfied that the grievance discloses a case to answer, the Chair of Ethics shall invite all parties to the grievance to a **formal hearing** at a mutually convenient time but preferably within a further 21 days.

If the panel is not satisfied that the grievance discloses a case to answer, the grievance shall be dismissed, and the parties promptly notified. This decision shall be final, and no appeal will be considered. If the panel considers the grievance trivial or vexatious, then the panel Chair should put this in writing to the IPSS Chair and Chair of Ethics explaining their reasons.

Formal hearing. For a formal hearing, the Assessment Panel will be joined by two members of Council (of more than five years IPSS membership) and/or the Ethics Committee, jointly identified by the IPSS Chair and the Chair of Ethics. Any person with conflicting interests shall be excluded from the panel. If either the Chair of IPSS or the Chair of Ethics is the subject of the grievance, their part in the process will become the responsibility of the Chair of Members. The same procedure applies if the

formal grievance is against a committee or other group. If the grievance is against Council or the Ethics Committee then the two additional members of the Hearing Panel will be other long standing IPSS members (of five or more years membership).

Ahead of this formal hearing, the Chair of Ethics will ensure all Members of the Hearing Panel are given copies of the updated grievance file. The Hearing Panel will appoint itself a Chair. At the Hearing Panel either party is entitled to be accompanied by another IPSS member for support. The Panel may ask the Chair of IPSS to make available specialist advice and/or documentation (e.g., matters of law, contractual).

The five Hearing panelists shall share their views with the two parties. They may recommend that the matter can be resolved by way of conciliation, or they may arrive at an adjudication.

If the way of conciliation is acceptable to the person(s) raising the grievance and to the person(s) against whom it is raised, another meeting may be held to work out a solution acceptable to both parties (preferably within four weeks). A solution arrived at by conciliation following from a formal hearing shall be final.

The Hearing Panel may ask the Chair of IPSS to make available mediation or arbitration conducted by an external service. Attendance shall be paid by IPSS for as many hours as approved by the Chair of Ethics and IPSS Treasurer (provided these roles are not shared) in consultation with the external service. A solution arrived at by such Alternative Dispute Resolution shall be final.

If the recommendation of conciliation is rejected by either or both of the parties, then the Hearing Panel will be required to adjudicate.

If the panel is required or decides on an adjudication, the outcome may range from dismissing the grievance, to issuing formal warnings. In exceptional cases the panel may apply an appropriate sanction.

The Chair of the Hearing Panel shall inform the two parties of their decision in response to the grievance, subsequently confirmed in writing (within 21 days).

Where a member raises a grievance in good faith and the grievance is not subsequently upheld, no further action shall be taken. However, if the Hearing Panel advises the Chair of IPSS and Chair of Ethics that they consider a member has raised or persists in raising false, malicious or vexatious grievances, then IPSS Council may consider applying an appropriate sanction. For example, in the case of persistently unsubstantiated or vexatious grievances, IPSS membership may be terminated by the IPSS Council following a majority vote. However, such a measure will always, and only, be undertaken as a final resort to maintain the viability and stability of the IPSS in the interests of all members.

The Hearing Panel's adjudication is final, and no appeals will be considered.

In instances of serious and proven misconduct, the IPSS constitution gives Council the right to suspend or terminate individual membership of the organisation.

Scheduled Review: **September 2028**