

Quick Guide

Dealing with grievances

Why it matters...

Grievances are usually raised about problems with a working relationship or where there is discontent about a management decision.

It is important that these types of issues are resolved before there is a negative impact on the individual's health, work and colleagues. The grievance may mean that changes need to be made to a management decision – this should obviously happen sooner rather than later.

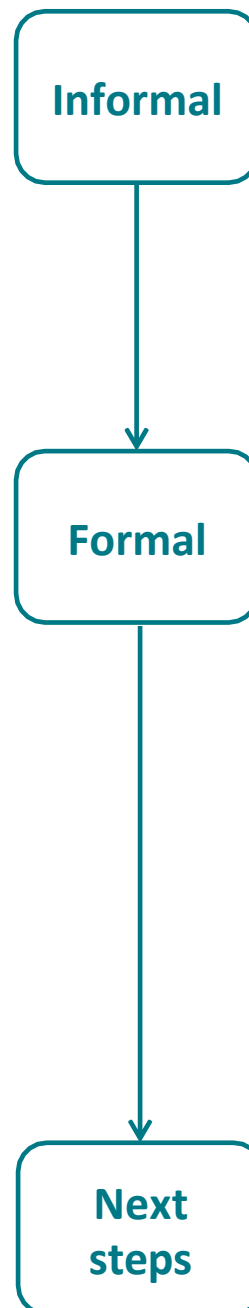
Grievances may highlight misconduct – such as bullying or harassment – which needs to be tackled quickly.

What do I need to do?

Where you suspect that someone is unhappy in the workplace, you should broach the issue even if they have not raised it with you. It is much easier to resolve problems at an early stage and much less time consuming than going through a formal procedure.

Where a grievance has been raised, informally or formally, it is important not to take a defensive position or react too quickly. Take time to understand the problem and seek advice if necessary. Listen carefully so you properly understand the nature of the problem – asking for evidence where necessary.

How it works



- Grievances should always be tackled informally if possible.
- Discuss the issues face to face. Give the individual time to set out their evidence and preferred outcome.
- Get advice from HR – they will support at every stage.
- Individual sets out their grievance in writing with evidence and the resolution being sought.
- Anyone named should be given the chance to respond and met with separately (if necessary).
- If bullying or harassment is alleged, consult your Senior Employee Relations Adviser about whether this is now a potential disciplinary case.
- A hearing will take place where the individual can state their case and be questioned.
- There is an option to take the case to the next level of management (those covered by Ordinance 41 may also go to the VC). Otherwise, it is important make a fresh start.

Contact your Senior Employee Relations Adviser/Employee Relations Adviser for support. For more Quick Guides go to '[People Strategy in Action](#)'.

[Grievance procedure](#) and guidance

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How will I know I have got it right?

Tackling and resolving grievances is not easy but it is much better to get issues out in the open. It should lead to:

- A reduction in stress and anxiety for the individual concerned - whether or not their grievance has been upheld.
- Members of the wider team should be reassured and relieved to see an aggrieved colleague receive a fair hearing (whether they support the grievance or not).

How might someone react?

No supporting evidence: someone may present a grievance for example about a colleague's behaviour without any evidence. In this case, ask for evidence to be provided and warn that there may not be any resolution.

Anger / upset: discussing grievances can generate a lot of emotion – it is important to recognise that this is not unusual while also responding calmly and focussing on addressing the issues.

No proposed resolution: encourage the individual to focus on what will restore good working relations. It may not be possible for this to happen but all parties need to focus on resolving the issue.

Where there has been a difficult meeting to discuss a grievance at the informal stage, it may be more productive for them to put the grievance in writing to form the basis of a separate discussion. In such a case, always offer to meet again when they have had a chance to reflect and calm down.

Tips for discussing workplace grievances

- Give the individual time to explain the issues and say all they need to say. Resist any temptation to step in and try and resolve the matter.
- It is understandable that someone may be upset and it is important to acknowledge the emotion while responding calmly.
- Explore whether there are any other factors affecting the individual, e.g. health issues, worries outside of work, through open questions.
- You do not need to respond or resolve the matter at the meeting. Take time to consider afterwards but let the individual know when you will respond.

Try not to take a defensive position or react too quickly – listen to the problem and try to understand why the individual feels as they do.

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