

Handling an employee grievance, 5 key actions



This is a 5 step guide to handling an employee grievance effectively and efficiently in order to save management time, preserve employee relations and keep the business out of Employment Tribunals. It includes 2 Golden Rules of handling an employee grievance.

Grievances are concerns, problems or complaints raised by an employee about workplace issues such as their work, workload, where they work or who they work with. These grievances are best dealt with at an early stage informally, but employers must be prepared to handle employee grievances that cannot be resolved informally using a formal employee grievance procedure

It's important for every business, whatever its size, to have a formal grievance procedure in place, which takes into account the ACAS Code of Practice. Include your formal grievance procedure in the staff handbook, and, importantly ensure your staff are aware of it. Employers have a duty to provide staff with details of any workplace disciplinary and grievance procedures.

[Discipline and Grievance – Acas Code of Practice.](#)

The procedure should require the employee to set out in writing the nature of their grievance and for employers to deal with the grievance fairly and consistently. Do not ignore any concern or complaint raised by an employee, however casual the manner in which it was raised.

These are the 5 steps:

1. **INFORMAL ACTION**- Initially and as soon as they can the line manager should have a quiet word with the employee making the complaint. Problems can often be settled quickly and informally in the course of everyday work. However, if the grievance is not settled at this stage or circumstances make this route inappropriate then, if they have not already done so, the employee should be requested to submit a formal Grievance letter.
2. **INVITE EMPLOYEE TO A FORMAL MEETING** - This should be held in a private and confidential room between the Manager designated to hear the Grievance and the employee who may be accompanied by a work colleague or Trade Union official. This is the opportunity for the grievance to be thoroughly discussed and any witnesses called.
3. **INVESTIGATION** - Depending on the complexity of the grievance it may be necessary to adjourn the meeting so that further investigation may take place before any decision is taken.
4. **COMMUNICATE DECISION & KEEP RECORDS** - After the grievance meeting and any investigations have taken place, the employer needs to decide whether to uphold or dismiss the grievance and communicate this decision to the employee in writing without unreasonable delay, usually within 10 working days. The HR Director or Manager handling the employee grievance must ensure that the minutes of all formal grievance

meetings are taken and copies given to the employee for information. The minute taker should not be part of the discussions about the outcome of the grievance or appeal other than to record the key points of the discussion.

5. APPEAL – if the Grievance is rejected or partially rejected then the employee has the right to appeal against that decision. The appeal should be heard promptly and wherever possible by a Manager not previously involved in the case. The employee may be accompanied as before and notified in writing of the decision, again within 10 working days is standard practice.

THE 2 GOLDEN RULES OF HANDLING EMPLOYEE GRIEVANCES

1. A very helpful question to ask an employee raising a grievance is “what outcome do you want from this grievance?” This tends to focus the employee’s mind on the solution he or she is looking for rather than just the problem.
2. BE PREPARED FOR A GRIEVANCE. Check that there is an up to date procedure in place, published in the handbook, that supports the resolution of grievance issues in your workplace.

Please also note an employee can raise a grievance during a disciplinary process. The disciplinary process may be temporarily suspended or if the grievance and disciplinary cases are related it may be appropriate to deal with both issues concurrently. The size of the business may require an expert outside advisor e.g experienced HR professional to hear the Grievance, the Appeal or even the Disciplinary.

Bear in mind also that where the Grievance Procedure itself is not appropriate then with the employee’s consent an external Mediator might be more suitable.

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