



## Top Tips for Managing Workplace Grievances: From Investigation to Resolution

Workplace grievances are an inevitable part of managing people, but how you handle them can make the difference between resolving issues effectively and creating bigger problems. When someone raises a grievance, they're often feeling frustrated, upset, or unfairly treated. Your response sets the tone for not just resolving their specific concern, but for how your entire workforce views your commitment to fairness and respect.

Getting grievances right isn't just about following procedures - it's about creating a workplace where people feel confident their concerns will be heard and dealt with properly. This guide takes you through the entire process, from the moment a grievance is raised through to resolution and beyond, giving you practical tips to handle each stage effectively.

### Taking a First Look

**Acknowledge Receipt Promptly** - Let the person know you've received their grievance and will be looking into it. This shows you're taking it seriously and gives them confidence the matter won't be ignored.

**Decide if It's a Grievance** - Not every complaint needs a formal grievance process. Some issues might be better resolved through informal discussion, while others clearly need formal investigation.

**Consider Immediate Action** - Think about whether any immediate steps are needed to protect people or prevent the situation getting worse whilst you investigate. This might include temporary changes to working arrangements.

**Determine the Right Approach** - Decide whether the issue needs a full formal investigation, could be resolved through mediation, or might be dealt with informally. Consider the seriousness and complexity of the complaint.

## Planning Your Investigation

**Get the Right Person for the Job** - Choose someone who's impartial and is not involved in the complaint. They should have the skills and seniority to handle the situation properly. If you don't have anyone suitable internally, consider bringing in external support.

**Set Clear Terms of Reference** - Define exactly what you're investigating, what questions need answering, and what your timescales are. This keeps everyone focused and prevents the investigation from wandering off track or dragging on indefinitely.

**Plan Your Approach** - Think about who you need to speak to, what documents you'll need to review, and in what order you'll do things. A bit of planning upfront saves time and confusion later.

**Inform All Parties** - Let everyone involved know what's happening, what the process will be, and roughly how long it might take. This reduces anxiety and shows you're taking things seriously.

## Conducting the Investigation

**Start with the Complainant** - Get their full story first, including specific examples, dates, and any evidence they have. Ask open questions and let them explain things in their own words. Make sure they understand the process and their rights.

**Gather Evidence Methodically** - Collect relevant documents, emails, CCTV footage, or other evidence before it gets lost or deleted. Handle everything carefully and keep clear records of what you've collected and when.

**Interview Witnesses Fairly** - Speak to anyone who might have relevant information. Be clear about confidentiality and ask them to stick to facts rather than opinions. Don't lead them or put words in their mouth.

**Give the Accused a Fair Hearing** - Let them know the allegations and give them a proper chance to respond. They should understand what they're accused of and have an opportunity to provide their version of events and any evidence.

**Keep Detailed Notes** - Write down what people tell you, when you spoke to them, and who was present. Ask people to confirm their statements are accurate. Good notes protect everyone and help you remember important details later.

## Reviewing Your Findings

**Look at All the Evidence** - Don't just focus on what supports one side or the other. Consider everything you've gathered and weigh it all up objectively. Sometimes the full picture only becomes clear when you step back and look at everything together.

**Apply the Balance of Probabilities** - You don't need proof beyond reasonable doubt - just whether something is more likely than not to have happened. Base your conclusions on the evidence, not on who you believe or like more.

**Consider Patterns and Context** - Look for recurring themes or behaviours. Sometimes individual incidents might seem minor, but together they paint a different picture. Consider the workplace culture and any relevant circumstances.

**Make a Decision Based on Available Evidence** - Even when evidence is limited, you still need to reach a conclusion on the balance of probabilities. Consider all the information you have, weigh up what's most likely to have happened, and make your decision accordingly. Document your reasoning clearly, especially when the evidence is finely balanced.

## Writing Your Outcome Report

**Keep It Clear and Factual** - Write in plain English that everyone can understand. Stick to facts and avoid unnecessary jargon or overly complicated language. Structure it logically so people can follow your reasoning.

**Separate Facts from Conclusions** - Clearly distinguish between what you found out (the facts) and what you concluded from those facts. This helps people understand how you reached your decisions.

**Be Specific About Recommendations** - Don't just say "further action needed" - be clear about what should happen next. If you're recommending disciplinary action, explain why and what type might be appropriate.

**Consider All Options** - Think about different ways to resolve the situation. Sometimes training, mediation, or changes to working arrangements might be more appropriate than disciplinary action.

## Linking to Disciplinary Proceedings

**Decide if Disciplinary Action is Needed** - Just because a grievance is upheld doesn't automatically mean disciplinary action is required. Consider whether the behaviour was deliberate, the impact it had, and whether the person understood it was wrong.

**Separate the Processes** - If disciplinary action is needed, start a separate disciplinary process. Don't try to combine them - they serve different purposes and have different procedures.

**Use Your Investigation as Evidence** - Your investigation report becomes evidence in the disciplinary process, but the disciplinary hearing should still give the person a chance to respond to any allegations.

**Consider the Range of Outcomes** - Think about what's proportionate, from informal discussions through to formal warnings or even dismissal for serious cases. The punishment should fit the behaviour and take account of the person's record.

**Plan for Different Scenarios** - Consider what happens if the disciplinary action is successful, unsuccessful, or if the person appeals. Think about ongoing working relationships and whether any adjustments are needed.

## Following Up

**Monitor the Situation** - Don't assume everything is fine once you've made your decision. Check in with all parties to make sure the resolution is working and there are no ongoing issues.

**Review Your Processes** - Look at what worked well and what could be improved for next time. Use each case as a learning opportunity to strengthen your approach.

**Support All Parties** - Remember that everyone involved may need support to move forward, regardless of the outcome. This might include training, coaching, or just regular check-ins.

**Document Lessons Learned** - Keep a record of what you've learned from each case to help improve your handling of future grievances. This builds your expertise and helps create a more positive workplace culture.

## Final Thoughts

The key to successful grievance management is being thorough, fair, and consistent throughout the entire process. When people see that issues are handled properly, it builds trust and confidence in your organisation's commitment to treating everyone with respect and fairness. Remember, how you handle grievances sends a powerful message to your entire workforce about your values and culture. Get it right, and you'll not only resolve individual problems but strengthen your whole organisation's approach to treating people well.