Employee Grievances: Handling Complaints Fairly

When an employee raises a complaint, the employer needs a fair way to understand the concern, investigate the facts and respond. An early, properly documented process can help prevent workplace problems escalating.

1. Recognise when a grievance needs a formal response

A grievance can concern working arrangements, pay, bullying, treatment by a manager or another workplace issue. Listen without prejudging the complaint, explain the available informal and formal routes, and recognise when the seriousness of the allegation requires a formal investigation.

A worker should be able to raise concerns with someone other than their line manager if that manager is involved in the complaint. Confirm receipt promptly and set out what happens next.

2. Investigate fairly and protect confidentiality

Appoint an investigator with appropriate independence. Identify what needs checking, interview relevant people and retain dated evidence, including witness statements and communications. Share information only with people who need it for the process.

Give the employee a fair opportunity to explain their concern. Consider support and reasonable adjustments, and be alert to discrimination, victimisation or whistleblowing issues.

Example | Complaint about a supervisor

An employee alleges repeated unfair allocation of shifts by their immediate supervisor. HR receives the complaint directly, checks rosters and messages, interviews the parties separately and records the outcome. The supervisor does not investigate their own conduct.

3. Hold a meeting, decide and offer an appeal

Arrange a grievance meeting without unreasonable delay. Explain the statutory right to be accompanied by an eligible companion at a formal grievance hearing, consider the evidence and communicate the decision and reasoning in writing.

The employee should be able to appeal. Where practicable, an uninvolved manager should hear the appeal and provide the final outcome in writing.

4. Keep a clear, restricted case record

Retain the original complaint, investigation notes, evidence, meeting details, decisions, appeal materials and dates. Use permissions so that sensitive allegations do not become general personnel information.

Common errors employers should avoid

- Allowing the person complained about to control the investigation.
- Giving a verbal outcome without a documented decision or appeal route.

How Assyst helps employers maintain grievance case records

Assyst enables authorised HR users to open disciplinary and grievance cases and keep allegations, investigation notes, witness statements, hearing documents, decisions and outcomes together on the employee HR file. Staff can report concerns through the app directly to HR, including by name or anonymously, without having to approach a line manager. HR-restricted access permissions help keep sensitive material secure; letters and communications can be issued and retained in the platform.

Discuss your workforce requirements with Assyst

Assyst Workforce Management is a workforce management platform for multi-site employers, bringing together HR and paperless onboarding, time and attendance, workforce scheduling, payroll calculations, task management and a mobile staff app. To discuss how Assyst could support your business, visit www.assyst.uk and contact us through the website.

Useful official sources

Acas — Formal grievance procedure
https://www.acas.org.uk/grievance-procedure-step-by-step

Acas — Raising a formal grievance
https://www.acas.org.uk/grievance-procedure-step-by-step/step-2-raising-a-formal-grievance

Acas — Code of Practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures
https://www.acas.org.uk/acas-code-of-practice-on-disciplinary-and-grievance-procedures

General guidance for employers in Great Britain, reviewed November 2026. Contract terms and individual circumstances may require professional advice.