

A manager's guide to handling a grievance fairly



A calm, step by step process for small teams, based on the Acas Code of Practice. Updated October 2026.

ACAS CODE / LAW from the Acas Code of Practice or the law

GOOD PRACTICE not required, but it helps

Before you start: what a grievance is

- ☐ **A grievance is a concern, problem or complaint an employee raises with you.** It could be about pay, hours, how a colleague or manager treats them, or a change at work. (Acas Code, para 1) **ACAS CODE / LAW**
- ☐ **Try a quiet, informal conversation first,** where it suits. Many concerns are settled this way, and that is often what the employee wants. Formal steps are there if it doesn't work or the issue is serious. **GOOD PRACTICE**
- ☐ **Thank them for raising it.** Someone telling you about a problem is a sign of trust. Keep an open mind about the outcome. **GOOD PRACTICE**

The formal process, step by step

- 1 Ask for the grievance in writing.** The employee should raise it with a manager who isn't the subject of the complaint, without unreasonable delay. (para 32) **ACAS CODE / LAW**
- 2 Acknowledge it in writing within a few days,** and say when you'll meet, even if the full process takes longer. **GOOD PRACTICE**
- 3 Hold a meeting without unreasonable delay** and let the employee explain the grievance and how they think it should be settled. (paras 33 to 34) **ACAS CODE / LAW**
- 4 Offer the right to be accompanied.** Workers can bring a colleague or trade union representative to a grievance meeting about a duty you owe them. If the companion can't make it, you must move the meeting if they propose a reasonable time within five working days. (para 35; Employment Relations Act 1999, s10) **ACAS CODE / LAW**
- 5 Look into it properly.** Speak to anyone relevant and check documents before deciding. Keep notes of who said what and when. **GOOD PRACTICE**
- 6 Decide, and tell them in writing without unreasonable delay,** including what action (if any) you'll take and how they can appeal. (para 40) **ACAS CODE / LAW**
- 7 Hear any appeal impartially,** wherever possible by a manager who wasn't involved before. The employee can be accompanied again, and the appeal outcome goes in writing. (paras 41 to 45) **ACAS CODE / LAW**

Situations that need extra care

- ☐ **A disciplinary is already under way.** You can pause the disciplinary to deal with the grievance, or deal with both together if they're related. (para 46) **ACAS CODE / LAW**
- ☐ **The grievance is about you, the owner.** With nobody more senior, consider asking an independent person to hear it or the appeal, so the process is fair and seen to be fair. **GOOD PRACTICE**
- ☐ **It involves harassment, discrimination or whistleblowing.** Act promptly, protect the person raising it, and take advice early. The facts change the answer here. **GOOD PRACTICE**
- ☐ **Keep it confidential and support both sides,** including the person complained about, while it's looked into. **GOOD PRACTICE**

Acknowledgement wording you can adapt: *"Thank you for raising your concerns with me on [date]. I'm taking them seriously. I'd like to meet on [date and time] to talk them through. You're welcome to bring a colleague or trade union representative with you. If that time doesn't work for you or your companion, please let me know."*

Why it matters: tribunals can increase or reduce awards by up to 25% where a party unreasonably fails to follow the Acas Code. Since 1 October 2026, people generally have six months, not three, to bring most tribunal claims. Acas consulted on an updated Code in 2026 and expects it to apply from 2027, so check for changes.

Dealing with a grievance right now?

Book a 20-minute call: cal.com/arrun-greaves-sgfygb/20min
Or see thepockethr.co.uk/er-support.html

Arrun Greaves, The Pocket HR

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Croydon, working across the UK

General guidance for employers in England, Scotland and Wales, not legal advice. Sources: Acas Code of Practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures (2015), paras 1, 32 to 46 and foreword; Acas consultation on a draft updated Code (2026); Employment Relations Act 1999, section 10. Checked October 2026.