

RAISING CONCERNS – GUIDANCE FOR STAFF

Experiencing issues at work can be a difficult and upsetting situation to find yourself in, but there is guidance and support available to help you.

There are several informal and formal options available for raising and resolving issues at work. This guidance is designed to help you think about which of these is best for you and to help you prepare yourself. Raising concerns early and informally is the most effective way of resolving conflict, tackling inappropriate behaviour and minimising any negative impact on everyone involved. Often issues can be resolved just by talking concerns through, and this can also help to maintain or rebuild working relationships. However, for more serious instances or repeated patterns of inappropriate behaviour, or where previous informal attempts have failed, it may be necessary to follow a formal approach under the University's Grievance or other procedures. Depending on the nature of the issue, it is sometimes more appropriate to deal with the complaint as an allegation of misconduct under the relevant disciplinary procedure. Where it is unclear, an initial fact-finding process may be used to determine the best process to use.

Support is available from a number of sources

In the first instance you can speak to your line manager or the person responsible for HR in your area. You could also talk confidentially to a sympathetic colleague for more general help and support throughout the process. Raising a concern can be a difficult time, regardless of the process followed or the outcome. The fact that you wish to raise a concern will be due to the seriousness of the issue and how it has affected you. Raising concerns can take an emotional toll particularly if you have invested a lot of time and energy on it. Full details of this support are available on the [Wellbeing pages](#). If your concern involves sexual misconduct you may wish to refer to the [Breaking the silence webpages](#) <http://www.breakingthe/> for further sources of support.

It is therefore important throughout the process to take time to look after yourself, seek support if you need it, and think about what you need to stay well. Please see the [University Staff Support Services](#) and [Wellbeing](#) pages for further information, advice and support.

Raising concerns may also put a strain on your working relationships or on your relationships at home, and you may need to spend time rebuilding these. The University Mediation Service [University Mediation Service](#) and [Staff Counselling Centre](#) are available to support you.

Before raising a concern

If there is an issue that you would like resolved, first read the grievance policy, flowchart and any other relevant policies, e.g. [Dignity at Work Policy](#) (2023 ed.) if your concern is about the inappropriate behaviour of a colleague.

Consider what a reasonable resolution of your concern might look like. This will also help inform which route is most appropriate i.e. informal or formal.

If your concern relates to the Dignity at Work Policy (2023 ed.), you may wish to seek advice from a [Dignity at Work Contact](#). They can help you explore the different options available for resolution and prepare for your chosen approach.

When preparing to raise a concern about inappropriate behaviour, it can be useful to provide a record of events that includes the dates, times, location and any witnesses to the events. The log can include how the behaviour made you feel and the impact it had on you and your work. If you plan to share your record openly with the other person as part of an informal approach, you may want to consider confining the record to just the dates and times of key events or communications that show the pattern of behaviour. This may help the other person understand the issues without being overwhelmed and allow them to focus on what they need to do differently.

Direct informal resolution process

- If you feel comfortable raising your concerns directly with the other party, preparation is important. If it is a colleague's behaviour that you are concerned about, plan for the conversation and consider how the other person might respond. Describe the behaviour precisely, and where and when it happened. If you are vague the person may not remember or understand what you are talking about.
- Tell the person how you feel about what has happened and the impact it has had on you and your work.
- Describe the effect it is having on you (you may find for example that you are avoiding the person, feeling anxious and worried, or working less effectively).
- Be clear about what you would like to happen to stop the behaviour happening again.
- You should allow the other person to talk as well, so they can reply and explain the reasons for their behaviour. They may also want to ask you questions about what you've told them so they can understand it better.
- You could write or say:

"I have kept a record of when these incidents/this behaviour occurred, and I thought it might be helpful to share a few points from it with you to help you understand when it happens and how it comes across from my perspective...."

On the [date/day], at [time], you [describe the behaviour precisely]. When you [describe the behaviour], I felt [describe your feelings and reactions]. I want to try and resolve this matter with you informally in a constructive and positive way.

If the nature of the conversation does start to become argumentative or problematic, either one of you may want to suggest that the discussion is continued at a later date with the support of a trained facilitator or mediator. These options require the consent of both of you to proceed but being open to this type of informal meeting can help to avoid the issue

escalating into a more formal process. If you are not familiar with facilitated conversations and mediation, there is more information available on the [Mediation Service webpages](#).

If, however, you feel that the issue has been successfully resolved keep a note of what was discussed and, if appropriate, agreed for your own records.

If you are using this approach, remember to also think about *how* to talk to the other person, such as your tone of voice and body language, so that it is open and collaborative rather than confrontational; this means that your working relationship is more likely to resume on a positive basis if possible.

Informal approach with support

If you wish to follow the informal process outlined above, think about whether you might need some support to do so, this could be provided by your line manager, your local or central HR representative or divisional administrator, and approach them. You may wish to use the pointers above to plan what you want to say. You should discuss and agree the role of the support person.

Accessing some of the resources available via [Personal and Professional Development](#) (PPD) such as giving and receiving feedback might be useful to help you plan what you want to say and how.

Mediation or facilitated discussion

Mediation is a well established, confidential process for resolving disagreements. Two impartial third parties (mediators) help two people in dispute to attempt to reach an agreement and find a mutually acceptable resolution. More information about mediation and facilitated discussions can be found on the [Mediation Service webpages](#).

If you are interested in requesting mediation you may wish to discuss this with your line manager, local HR Contact or your HR Business Partnering team. A request can then be made on the [Mediation Request Form](#) and sent to mediation@admin.cam.ac.uk. A Mediation Co-ordinator will then contact you directly.

Formal grievance procedure

For more serious instances or repeated patterns of inappropriate behaviour, or where previous informal attempts have failed, you may wish to consider raising the matter formally under the grievance procedure. An overview of the grievance procedure as a flowchart is available.

Writing a formal grievance letter

If you wish to raise an issue formally, the first step is to put it in writing. The grievance procedure sets out who this should be addressed to. You should:

- Set out clearly the nature of your grievance.
- Include relevant facts, dates and names of individuals involved.
- If relevant, clearly describe the inappropriate behaviours, explaining why they are unwanted and describe the alternative, appropriate behaviours.
- Provide clear evidence for any facts and figures.
- Concentrate on particular events and actions.
- Avoid using insulting or abusive language.
- Include any informal action already taken.
- Consider whether there are any witnesses who have something relevant to add and include their names.
- Indicate the reasonable outcome/resolution that you are seeking.
- Submit all evidence with your grievance letter if possible.
- Date your letter and retain a copy.

If your grievance is unclear, you may be asked to clarify your complaint before any meeting takes place. You may wish to discuss with your companion or a dignity at work contact how best to clearly present your grievance in your letter.

If you feel that you are unable to work alongside the colleague named in the grievance whilst the process is underway, speak with your line manager or local HR team contact about what temporary changes might be possible to your working arrangements.

Preparing for your grievance meeting

You'll receive a letter in advance informing you of logistics and attendees. Attendees include the Responsible Person, an HR Representative and possibly a separate note taker.

During the meeting, be prepared to talk through your grievance in detail, expand on points raised in your letter, put forward witnesses, fill in any gaps, give a clear account of relevant events and be prepared to answer questions from the Responsible Person.

The tone of the meeting is investigative and does not aim to be confrontational.

Alternatively, you may have an initial meeting with the Responsible Person, who will then adjourn the meeting for further investigations to take place (which may be carried out by the Responsible Person or a different Investigator)

If you require any adjustments to be made for meetings, please contact the HR Representative dealing with your grievance to request them. You can also ask them any questions you wish to about the procedure.

Choose a companion

Your companion may accompany you to investigation meetings, grievance meetings and appeal hearings. If you are a member of a Trade Union (TU), a representative may accompany you. If you are not a member of a TU, you may wish to approach a colleague who will be able to support you and help you to prepare for the meeting. Your companion

should not also be a witness to any events that form part of your grievance. While your companion will receive paid time off to attend the meeting, their role is completely voluntary. Please inform HR of your choice of companion in good time before your meeting.

At the meeting your Companion may:

- address the meeting
- put and sum up your case
- respond on behalf of you to any views expressed at the meeting
- confer with you during the meeting

Your Companion may not:

- answer questions on your behalf
- address the hearing if you does not wish it
- prevent the employer from explaining their case

After the meeting

You will be asked to agree the notes of the meeting and will be given further information about how to do this and what to do if you don't agree with what has been written.

Grievances should be resolved without unreasonable delay in the interests of all parties. However, this may vary due to unavoidable delays. You can expect to be kept informed of anticipated time frames.

The Responsible Person will provide you with written confirmation of their wherever possible within 10 working days of the grievance meeting (or re-convened meeting as appropriate). The letter will set out clearly the outcome, whether your grievance is upheld or not and any action which is to be taken to resolve the grievance.

If your grievance is upheld, outcomes may be:

- requirement to attend training
- instigating a disciplinary procedure against the colleague named in your grievance
- referral to the University Mediation Service

You will also be provided with details of your right to appeal.

At the end of the process

After the process is completed, you might be satisfied and relieved with the outcome, but still feel overwhelmed by what you have been through. Alternatively, you might feel disappointed and frustrated if the outcome isn't what you had hoped or you feel the matter isn't fully resolved. The University Support Services are available to support you.