Raising Concerns at Work: A Guide for AEP Members

Introduction

If you have a problem at work, it is usually best to try to resolve it informally before moving to a formal process.

This guide has been developed for AEP members and will help you:

- identify the issue and what outcome you want
- raise concerns informally with your employer
- understand when and how to escalate matters through a formal grievance procedure

Many workplace concerns can be resolved through timely discussion and constructive problem-solving. However, where this is not possible, or where concerns are serious, formal procedures may be necessary.

Before submitting a formal grievance, resigning from your role, or taking any action that could affect your employment, you should seek advice from the AEP. Time limits can apply to legal claims, and obtaining advice early is important.

The Three-Step Process

Step 1: Identify the Problem

Step 2: Raise the Issue Informally

Step 3: Escalate the Matter if Necessary

Important Exceptions

There are situations where an informal approach may not be appropriate.

Examples include:

- safeguarding concerns
- child protection issues
- serious professional misconduct
- bullying, harassment or discrimination
- sexual harassment or assault
- health and safety risks
- serious breaches of professional standards

- whistleblowing concerns

In these situations, your employer's formal procedures may need to be followed immediately.

Always check your employer's policies and procedures before deciding how to proceed.

Step 1: Identify the Problem

Before raising a concern, take time to identify clearly:

- what the issue is
- why it concerns you
- what outcome you are seeking

Being clear from the outset will help you communicate effectively and increase the likelihood of achieving a satisfactory resolution.

Consider Your Rights

Your rights will depend on:

- your contract of employment
- local policies and procedures
- employment legislation
- professional standards

Common issues raised by AEP members include:

- workload and caseload concerns
- flexible working requests
- hybrid and home working arrangements
- health and safety concerns
- organisational restructuring
- capability procedures
- performance management
- bullying and harassment
- discrimination
- workplace adjustments for disability
- sickness absence management
- annual leave

- maternity, paternity and parental leave
- recruitment and promotion decisions

You should review:

- your contract of employment
- relevant workplace policies
- collective agreements such as Soulbury or NJC (Green Book)
- local authority/ employer procedures

Consider what you Want

Think carefully about your preferred outcome.

Ask yourself:

- What would resolve this issue?
- Is my proposed solution realistic?
- Is it reasonable?
- Is it achievable?
- Can the employer realistically implement it?

Examples might include:

- stopping inappropriate behaviour
- correcting inaccurate information
- receiving reasonable adjustments
- reviewing a management decision
- obtaining clarification about expectations
- resolving a workload concern
- restoring professional relationships

The clearer you are about the outcome you want, the easier it will be to explain your concerns.

Gather Evidence

Evidence is often critical when resolving workplace concerns.

Depending on the issue, relevant evidence may include:

- emails

- letters
- meeting notes
- supervision records
- workplace policies
- job descriptions
- appraisal documentation
- workload records
- notes of conversations
- diary records
- witness accounts
- Occupational Health reports
- medical evidence
- copies of formal correspondence

Where incidents occur over a period of time, it can be useful to maintain a contemporaneous record showing:

- dates
- times
- locations
- people involved
- actions taken
- impact on you

Consider whether discrimination may be involved

Particular consideration should be given where issues may involve:

- disability
- race
- sex
- pregnancy or maternity
- religion or belief
- sexual orientation
- gender reassignment
- age
- marriage or civil partnership status

Different legal protections may apply in these situations and you should seek advice as early as possible. Be aware that in a legal claim, the claimant is required to prove facts

which could reasonably suggest discrimination. There are strict legal time limits that apply which is why advice should be sought without delay.

Step 2: Raise the Issue Informally

Informal resolution is often the quickest and most effective way to deal with workplace concerns.

Many issues arise from misunderstandings, poor communication or differing expectations and can be resolved through discussion.

Who should you speak to?

This will depend on the nature of the issue.

Possible contacts include:

- your line manager
- your supervisor
- your principal educational psychologist
- a senior manager
- human resources
- a placement supervisor (for trainees)
- a designated wellbeing or equality lead

If your concern relates directly to your manager, consider approaching a more senior manager or Human Resources.

How should you raise the concern?

Options may include:

- an informal conversation
- a telephone discussion
- a video meeting
- a written email
- a structured discussion with management support

Choose the approach that best fits the circumstances.

A face-to-face conversation may be sufficient to resolve some concerns quickly.

In other cases, a written approach may be preferable, particularly where there is a need to create a record.

What should you say?

A useful approach is to structure your concern in three parts.

- **Describe the Issue**
- **Explain Why It Is a Concern**
- **Suggest a Solution**

Keep Records

It is important to keep your own records of:

- meetings attended
- conversations held
- emails exchanged
- actions agreed
- timescales discussed

If informal solutions are unsuccessful, these records may later become important.

Did it work?

After raising your concern informally, consider:

- Was the issue resolved?
- Was an explanation provided?
- Were agreed actions completed?
- Has the situation improved?

If yes, no further action may be necessary.

If not, you may need to escalate the matter.

Step 3: Escalate the matter

If informal efforts do not resolve the issue, you may need to use your employer's formal grievance procedure.

Before submitting a formal grievance, members should seek advice from the AEP.

Check Your Employer's Policy

Your grievance procedure should explain:

- how to submit a grievance
- who should receive it
- how investigations will be conducted
- hearing arrangements
- appeal processes

Where no local procedure exists, employers should generally follow the principles set out in the ACAS Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures.

Writing a Formal Grievance

Formal grievances should normally be made in writing. You should seek advice from the AEP before submitting a grievance.

Include Key Facts

Clearly explain:

- what happened
- when it happened
- where it happened
- who was involved
- the impact on you

Identify Witnesses

Where relevant, identify:

- witnesses
- managers involved
- individuals who may hold relevant information

Present events chronologically

Where concerns involve a series of events, set them out in the order in which they occurred.

A clear timeline often helps employers understand the issues.

Include supporting evidence

Attach relevant evidence where possible, including:

- emails
- correspondence
- policies
- meeting notes
- Occupational Health reports
- workload data
- diary records

Explain Your Desired Outcome

Be clear about what you would like to happen.

Examples may include:

- a review of a decision
- mediation
- implementation of reasonable adjustments
- management intervention
- correction of records
- action to address inappropriate behaviour
- payment of outstanding wages

Explain any informal attempts

If you have already attempted to resolve matters informally, explain:

- who you spoke to
- when discussions took place
- what was agreed
- why the matter remains unresolved

Before taking further action

Before:

- submitting a formal grievance
- resigning
- entering settlement discussions

- registering with Acas for early conciliation
- pursuing an Employment Tribunal claim

you should seek advice from the AEP.

Employment Tribunal claims are subject to strict time limits, which are often shorter than people expect. Delaying action may affect your options.

From the 1 October 2026, Employment Tribunal claim time limits will increase from three months minus one day to six months minus one day in most cases for dismissal or incidents arising after 1 October 2026.

The position in Northern Ireland varies, please contact us if you require more information.

AEP Support

The AEP can support members who are experiencing:

- workplace conflict
- bullying or harassment
- discrimination
- unreasonable workload demands
- capability procedures
- sickness absence management issues
- restructuring or reorganisation
- disciplinary concerns
- grievances and complaints

Early advice often helps resolve concerns more effectively and may prevent workplace problems from escalating into formal disputes.