

# Global grievance policy

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## 1.0 Introduction

It is essential to maintain constructive employee relations to support staff wellbeing and enable the proper functioning of Sightsavers. This policy enables employees to raise and address any concerns, problems or complaints they may have so we can resolve any issues promptly, fairly and in the interest of everyone involved.

Sightsavers encourages open and honest communication among employees and managers to resolve issues or disputes that may arise in connection with problems at work. Employees and managers have a mutual responsibility to ensure that proper attempts are made to try to resolve any grievances through informal means and, where appropriate, through mediation, before escalating matters to formal stages of the grievance procedure. It is widely recognised that early informal resolution is the most constructive approach and is more likely to lead to an early satisfactory outcome for all parties.

## 2.0 Scope and definitions

Issues that may cause grievances include (but are not limited to): terms and conditions of employment, health and safety, work relations, bullying and harassment, new working practices, working environment, and organisational change and discrimination. Sightsavers operates a separate Global Whistleblowing Policy and Procedures to enable employees to report illegal activities, wrongdoing or malpractice. However, where you are directly affected by the matter in question, or if you feel you have been victimised for an act of whistleblowing, you can raise the matter under this Grievance Procedure.

This policy is available to all employees of Sightsavers. From time to time several employees may be affected by the same or similar circumstances which they consider are more effectively dealt with by a collective grievance. In such cases, the same procedure will be followed as in the case of an individual grievance, with necessary adjustments, and the group of employees will be treated as if they had raised the matter as a single individual. A single notification of grievance will be made, and all members of the group may attend the meeting and any appeal.

This procedure should not be used to complain about dismissal or disciplinary action. If an employee is dissatisfied with any disciplinary action, they should submit an appeal under the Global Disciplinary Policy and Procedure. Similarly, we have a separate Discrimination, Bullying & Harassment Policy and Procedure that may be useful if an employee feels they have been the victim of bullying or harassment, or wishes to report bullying or harassment involving other people. For the avoidance of doubt, any employee who has questions or concerns about an ongoing redundancy consultation process should normally raise those issues as part of their individual consultation.

All grievances must be raised promptly and without undue delay.

This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and we may amend it at any time.

### Definitions

**Employee:** an employee of Sightsavers and the person who is raising the complaint or grievance.

**Respondent:** any person that a grievance has been made about or against.

**Employee's representative:** the person accompanying the employee, who will normally be a trade union representative or work colleague, in line with their country-specific legal requirements.

**Line manager:** the immediate manager of the employee. Sometimes it may be appropriate for an alternative manager to act in their place.

## 3.0 Principles

Wherever possible, every effort will be made to resolve grievances promptly and informally through discussion and/or mediation.

All employees have the right to raise a formal grievance should the informal process fail.

All complaints will be taken seriously and dealt with without unreasonable delay.

No decisions will be taken until a reasonable investigation to establish the facts has taken place.

The employee raising a grievance has the right to be accompanied by a representative to any grievance meeting or appeal meeting under this grievance procedure. This representative may either be a trade union representative or a colleague. At any meeting the representative may make representations and ask questions but should not answer questions on the employee's behalf.

If the grievance is against a named respondent, that individual will be spoken to as part of any investigation and will have the chance to respond to the allegations before any final decision is made. In addition, once the grievance is concluded, if Sightsavers determines that disciplinary action may be justified the respondent will be afforded all the usual rights and entitlements under the Global Disciplinary Policy.

At any stage in the procedure, or between stages, mediation may be sought through the HR Operations Team.

Employees and their representatives should make every effort to attend meetings as requested.

Employees have the right to appeal against any decisions made.

If an employee has lodged a grievance against a particular respondent, the employee raising the complaint will be informed if the grievance is upheld or not upheld and broadly what steps, if any, Sightsavers intends to take. For the avoidance of doubt, they do not have the right to be informed of the specific details and outcomes of any further proceedings involving the respondent. Such information is confidential to Sightsavers and those involved in conducting the proceedings.

## 4.0 Additional notes and guidance

In the course of a disciplinary process, an employee might raise a grievance that is related to the case. If this happens, the line manager or other person reviewing the case will consider

whether it is appropriate or necessary to suspend the disciplinary procedure for a short period while the grievance is dealt with. The Senior HR Business Partner will advise in such cases and, depending on the nature of the grievance and/or disciplinary, may suggest another manager to deal with the continuation of the disciplinary process.

If there are any factors that might affect an individual's ability to present or answer a grievance, such as language or disability, additional support arrangements will be made.

## 5.0 Confidentiality

When handling a grievance, it is vital to ensure an appropriate level of confidentiality. Sightsavers will carefully consider on a case-by-case basis what information is necessary to disclose to the employee raising the grievance, any respondent and/or any other affected or interested party. Whenever reasonably possible, Sightsavers will also seek to obtain explicit consent to the disclosure of information before proceeding.

Unless advised otherwise by Sightsavers, the employee, their representative, any respondent and/or witnesses should not discuss the grievance, investigation or contents of their statements with any other employees or third parties outside of the grievance process. Any breach of this requirement will be considered a serious matter to be addressed under the Disciplinary Policy.

For the avoidance of doubt, the employee may discuss the matter with their representative should they have one. If any employee, representative, respondent or witness is at all unclear in this regard, they should contact a Senior HR Business Partner to seek clarification and assistance.

Notes will be taken at meetings at each stage of the procedure as a record of proceedings. Notes will not be verbatim (word for word) but will form an accurate summary of the discussions that took place. A copy of all documentation will be kept confidentially by HR in accordance with specific country data protection laws.

## 6.0 Procedures for raising an informal grievance

For locations outside the UK, any local employment law requirements in relation to grievances, over and above this policy and procedure, should also be applied. If in doubt, seek advice from your Senior HR Business Partner.

Most grievances can be resolved quickly and informally through discussion with the employee's colleagues or line manager. However, if an employee feels unable to speak to their line manager, for example, because their complaint concerns him or her, they should speak informally to a more senior manager or an Senior HR Business Partner.

Where the matter is not resolved informally or if the matter is of a very serious nature, the employee should follow the formal stages of the policy and procedure below.

## 7.0 Procedures for raising a formal grievance

Where a grievance is sufficiently serious or when an employee has been unable to resolve a grievance informally, a formal grievance should be made in writing, to their line manager

and with a copy to the Senior HR Business Partner. The written formal grievance should provide the following details:

- The nature of the grievance
- Details of any relevant facts, individuals involved or evidence (including copies of any relevant documents)
- Any action taken by the employee to resolve the matter so far
- How the employee thinks it can be resolved.

If the line manager is the subject of the grievance, the grievance should be addressed to the line manager's manager and copied to the Senior HR Business Partner.

It may be necessary for the appropriate manager to investigate the matter, supported by a Senior HR Business Partner. The amount of any

investigation required will depend on the nature of the allegations and will vary from case to case. It may involve interviewing and taking statements from the employee and any other parties and witnesses they deem appropriate, as well as reviewing relevant documents. In some circumstances Sightsavers may ask the employee to provide further information.

Employees must co-operate fully and promptly in any investigation. This may include informing Sightsavers of the names of any relevant witnesses, disclosing any relevant documents and attending interviews.

Once any prior investigation deemed necessary by Sightsavers is complete (or immediately if Sightsavers deems it appropriate), a grievance meeting will be arranged with the employee. If the employee or their representative cannot attend at the time specified, they should inform Sightsavers immediately and we will try, within reason, to agree an alternative time. A note taker will normally be present at any formal meetings and summary notes taken. Recording of meetings is not permitted and will be considered misconduct.

The purpose of the grievance meeting is to enable the employee to explain their grievance and how they think it should be resolved, and to help Sightsavers to reach a decision based on the available evidence and any representations the employee has made. After this grievance meeting Sightsavers may carry out further investigations and hold further grievance meetings as it considers appropriate.

The line manager dealing with the grievance will then write to the employee to inform them of the outcome to their grievance. They will also remind the employee of the right to appeal. Where appropriate, they may hold a further meeting with the employee to give them the information in person.

## 8.0 Appeal

If the employee is not satisfied with the grievance outcome, they may appeal. They should write to the Senior HR Business Partner within five working days of receipt of the outcome letter from the original grievance, setting out the full reasons for their appeal.

Where possible, a senior manager who has not previously been involved in the case will hear the appeal impartially. The manager hearing the appeal will be supported by a Senior

HR Business Partner. Whoever hears the appeal will decide if any further meetings or investigation are required.

Appeal hearings should be held promptly and employees have the right to be accompanied by a representative to any meeting, in line with specific regulations in their country.

Once the appeal has been considered, the manager hearing the appeal will confirm their final decision and this will be confirmed to the employee in writing. There is no further right

We work with partners in low and middle income countries to eliminate avoidable blindness and promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities.

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