

Speaking Up Pathway

What happens after you raise a concern.
A clear guide to reporting routes
and fair process.



*"People don't stay silent because they
don't care. They stay silent because
they don't feel safe."*

Why this guide exists

Most people don't stay silent because they don't care. They stay silent because they don't know where to go, what will happen next, whether it's safe, or if anything will actually change.

This guide explains what happens after you speak up, what fair process looks like, and what to expect at each stage. If you're thinking about raising a concern, this is for you.

What counts as a concern

You don't need a legal case to raise something. If something doesn't feel right, you can name it. You don't have to be certain. You don't have to have proof.

You can raise concerns about

- Bullying, harassment, intimidation, or hostile treatment
- Racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, or other discrimination
- Microaggressions, exclusion, or being consistently sidelined
- Bias in hiring, promotion, or how decisions are made
- Unsafe working conditions or safeguarding concerns
- Retaliation for previously speaking up

Your reporting options

Most organisations offer multiple routes. You can choose what feels safest and most appropriate for your situation.

1 Informal route

When to use:

- The issue is early-stage or you want advice first
- You want the behaviour to stop without a formal process
- You're testing whether it's safe to escalate

What happens:

- You describe what's happening to someone you trust
- They may offer advice, mediation, or an informal conversation
- No formal record is created (usually)

Pros: Lower stakes, more control, quicker

Cons: No formal accountability, may not lead to consequences

2 Formal route

When to use:

- The behaviour is serious, repeated, or causing ongoing harm
- Informal options haven't worked
- You want it investigated and formally addressed

What happens:

- You submit a written complaint (or HR writes it up for you)
- Investigation: interviews with you, the other person, and witnesses
- Decision: upheld, partially upheld, or not upheld
- Consequences if upheld (warning, training, role change, dismissal)

Pros: Formal accountability, documented, potential for real consequences

Cons: Takes time, can be stressful, outcome uncertain

3 External route

When to use:

- You don't trust internal routes
- The issue involves senior leadership or HR themselves
- Internal routes have failed or you fear retaliation

What happens:

- Contact the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) for discrimination or unfair treatment
- Contact your union if you're a member
- Seek legal advice if considering legal action
- Report to a regulatory body if safeguarding or governance is involved

Pros: Independent, safer if internal trust is broken

Cons: May take longer, may involve legal processes

What fair process looks like

If you make a formal complaint, here is what you should expect at each stage.

Step 1: Acknowledgment (within 3 to 5 working days)

- Written confirmation that your complaint has been received.
- The name and contact details of the person handling it.
- An estimated timeline for next steps.
- Information about support available to you (counselling, adjustments).

Step 2: Investigation

- You are interviewed and asked to share your account.
- The person you've complained about is interviewed separately.
- Witnesses are contacted.
- You are kept informed of progress (not left in silence).

Step 3: Decision and outcome

- You are told the outcome: upheld, partially upheld, or not upheld.
- You receive a written summary of the decision.
- If upheld, you are told what action has been taken (within confidentiality limits).
- If not upheld, you are told why and what options remain.

Step 4: Follow-up

- You are checked in on after the process to see how you are.
- If the behaviour continues, the organisation treats it as a new, more serious incident.
- Your working conditions are monitored for any sign of retaliation.

Red flags: what unfair process looks like

Warning signs that the process is not being handled fairly

- You hear nothing for weeks after raising your concern.
- You're told 'we'll look into it' with no details, timeline, or follow-up.
- The person investigating has a close relationship with the person you've complained about.
- You're pressured to drop the complaint or 'move on'.
- The other person faces no visible consequences despite the complaint being upheld.
- You start experiencing changes to your workload, access, or treatment after reporting.

Protecting yourself from retaliation

Retaliation is when you're treated badly because you raised a concern. It's illegal and against most organisational policies, but it still happens. Knowing what it looks like helps you name it early.

Retaliation can look like

- Being excluded from meetings, projects, or opportunities
- Receiving negative performance reviews after raising a concern
- Being labelled 'difficult', 'oversensitive', or 'not a team player'
- Having your workload increased or reduced unfairly
- Facing hostility, coldness, or passive-aggressive behaviour

What you can do

- Before you raise a concern: document everything (emails, messages, incidents with dates).
- Save copies outside the work system (personal email, cloud storage).
- Know your rights: read your organisation's policy, speak to a union rep or legal adviser.
- After you raise a concern: keep documenting any changes in treatment.
- If you experience retaliation: raise it formally as a separate, serious issue.

If you're not happy with the outcome

Your options

- Internal appeal: most organisations allow you to appeal within 10 working days. A different person reviews the case.
- External complaint: contact the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) if the issue involves discrimination or unfair treatment. Time limits usually apply (6 months).
- Seek legal advice if you're considering further action.
- Contact your union for support, representation, or escalation.

What to remember

Your rights

- You have a right to raise concerns safely.
- You have a right to a fair, timely process.
- You have a right to be protected from retaliation.
- You don't need proof. You just need to name what's happening.
- If internal routes fail, external routes exist.

"Speaking up is hard. But silence has a cost too. If your organisation doesn't respond fairly, that's a failure of the organisation, not you."

About PhoenixRize Consulting

- I'm Adaku Oliver-Nnona, founder of PhoenixRize Consulting.
- I help organisations build workplaces where people are treated fairly, concerns are heard, and leaders are held accountable.
- My work spans culture risk advisory, anti-racism and bystander intervention programmes, inclusive leadership, and organisational culture change.
- To discuss how I can support your organisation, get in touch via phoenixrize.ie.

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