

Step into my office:

What to do when asked to attend a meeting with senior management

ATL occasionally receives calls from members who have been asked to attend an urgent meeting with the head, often at short notice and without being given an agenda or even an indication of its purpose. This factsheet answers common queries about such meetings and offers practical tips to help you maintain a sense of control.

Do I have the right to take a colleague or union representative?

Possibly. Workers have a statutory right to be accompanied by a colleague or trade union official where they are required or invited by their employer to attend certain disciplinary or grievance hearings.

What is a disciplinary hearing?

The *Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) Code of Practice, Disciplinary and grievance procedures*, defines a disciplinary hearing as one that could result in:

- a formal warning being issued to an employee (ie a warning that will be placed on the employee's record)
- the taking of some other disciplinary action (such as suspension without pay, demotion or dismissal); or
- the confirmation of a warning or some other disciplinary action (such as an appeal hearing).

Your employer's disciplinary procedures should be readily available, normally in the staff handbook.

What is a grievance hearing?

The ACAS guidance defines a grievance hearing as a meeting at which an employer deals with a complaint about a duty owed by them to an employee, whether the duty arises from statute or common law (eg contractual commitments).

Your employer's grievance procedures should be readily available, normally in the staff handbook.

What if the meeting is neither a disciplinary nor grievance hearing?

In this instance, you do not have the right to take a colleague or union representative along. Nevertheless, you can certainly ask if you can take a colleague or union rep with you. This will be considered at the employer's discretion.

However, if it becomes clear during the meeting that disciplinary action may be called for, then you should ask that the meeting is closed and rearranged to allow you to be accompanied by a colleague or union representative.

How should I prepare for and conduct myself during the meeting?

The following tips should help you get the most from the meeting:

- take a note book and pen
- note the time and location of the meeting together with the names of those present
- if you haven't already done so, ask for a brief agenda of items to be raised
- make sure the agenda is adhered to
- if asked questions that you cannot immediately answer, ask for time to check your records and consider your response; this may mean getting back to the head at a later date
- try not to become or appear defensive
- be wary of filling in any awkward silences
- keep calm – don't lose your temper
- do not allow yourself to be bullied – if you feel intimidated by body language/raised voices/'ganging up' then say so; if you begin to feel upset then ask for an adjournment
- you are entitled to bring a meeting to a close and leave if you do not wish to continue; however, if you can, try to stay calm and get to the conclusion of the discussion
- if concerns are being raised about your performance or conduct, then ask what evidence there is to substantiate them
- at the end of the meeting make sure that you summarise the main points and conclusions (including any assurances of support/training)
- after the meeting try to organise and flesh out your notes in more detail, and file them somewhere safe and accessible.

What if the meeting did not go well?

If you have any concerns about the content of the meeting or the manner in which it was conducted please speak to the ATL representative at your school, your branch secretary or contact ATL's London office (see below for details).



Need advice?

Your first point of contact is your ATL rep in your school or college. Your local ATL branch is also available to help with queries, or you can contact ATL's member advisers on **020 7930 6441**, email: **info@atl.org.uk** or write to 7 Northumberland Street, London WC2N 5RD. Don't forget you can also get lots of help and advice, as well as download copies of other ATL advice sheets, on our website at **www.atl.org.uk**

© Association of Teachers and Lecturers 2007. All rights reserved. Information on this sheet may be reproduced or quoted with proper acknowledgement to the Association.