



Civil Public & Services Union

**ONE VOICE!**

**FAIR PAY & CONDITIONS  
ADVICE & REPRESENTATION**

# Problems at work

a guide for members

What happens if you  
have a problem at work?

What can you expect  
from your union?



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Further information available on [www.cpsu.ie](http://www.cpsu.ie)  
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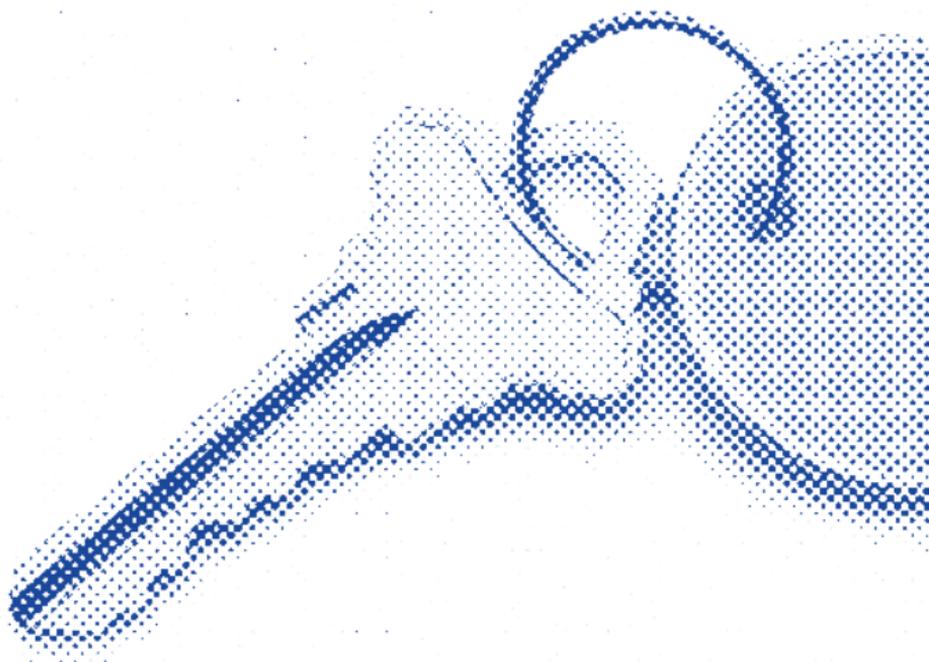
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# Introduction

This guidance leaflet is designed to give you the information on what you can expect from your representative and trade union official from internal procedures and how you can help them bring your case to a conclusion that you will find acceptable.

It gives you information about what you can do and outlines some of the difficulties that there can be in resolving cases.



# Talking to your union representative/Head office official/MIRU

- We cannot stress how important it is to talk to your union representative or full time official as soon as you can. You can contact the MIRU for confidential advice on individual workplace issues.
- Often members feel that they can sort things out on their own.
- When your CPSU representative gets a case to deal with, they will explore the full range of options that are open to you and seek advice if necessary from your full time union official.
- Your CPSU representative will agree a way forward with you and help you achieve the best possible outcome.
- In simple terms, approach your CPSU representative at the earliest opportunity to enable them to have the most scope for dealing with your case.
- Do not see CPSU as your last resort but your first response.
- Your CPSU representative will where possible arrange an office to meet you in and all discussions are completely confidential.

# What if I am not a member?

- CPSU is a membership organisation and is funded almost entirely from members contributions that pay for the insurance that it provides in times of difficulty.
- If you are reading this and you are not a member then you should join today, and get the benefit of the service.
- If you are already looking for help because of a problem at work then you should also join today. Your local rep may still be able to give you some advice and help.
- You should note that depending on the situation you may not be able to get assistance for things that happened before you became a member.

Find out about CPSU today by contacting CPSU Head Office, 19/20 Adelaide Road, Dublin 2 or by phoning 01 676 5394 or check out our website on [www.cpsu.ie](http://www.cpsu.ie)



# Contacts in the CPSU

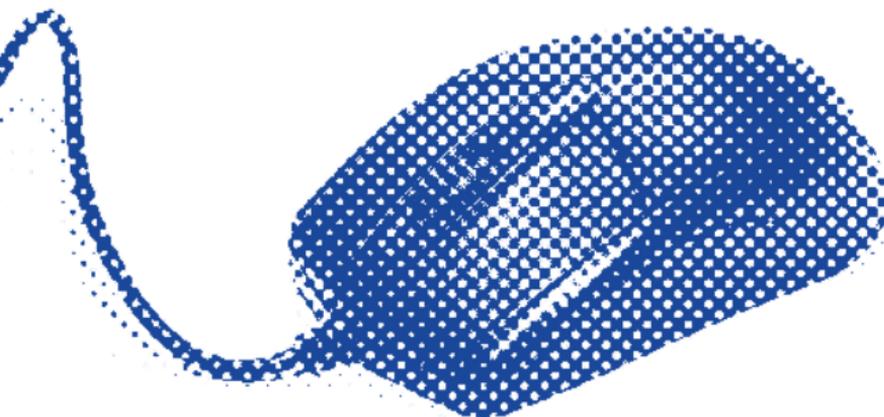
- Every member of CPSU is a member of a local union branch and you should receive information from your local branch on a regular basis.
- If you are unable to find out whom your local representative is or your branch secretary you should contact CPSU Headquarters.
- Bear in mind when making that first call, that if your case is genuinely urgent then your local representative/MIRU/head office official should be able to give you the time but if it can wait for a short while then you may be able to arrange to speak or meet when it is convenient to both of you.
- You should expect to be seen in private without interruption.
- In all cases meetings with you and your local or head office/MIRU representative will be confidential and he/she will not discuss your case with anyone unless you agree, other than to seek further guidance on your behalf.
- Sometimes your representative can provide you with the information you need by referring you to the codes and the manuals that can be sometimes difficult to navigate. In a lot of cases the local representative will seek further advice from the head office official and the following guidelines should help you explain your case.

# **Explaining your case to your Head Office/ MIRU case worker**

- While you are likely to be in full possession of the facts of your case this is almost certainly going to be the first time that the head office official/case worker has heard your explanation so make sure you are clear about what the issues are.
- You should prepare your case thoroughly before you meet your union representative.
- If possible, bring copies of all relevant papers, minutes and letters pertaining to your case and ensure that these documents are in date order (latest date on top).
- It may be worth preparing a time-line or other notes so that you can explain issues that you are concerned about as clearly as possible.
- Your official/case worker will not judge you as a person for the situation you are in and remember when you see your official/case worker you are not putting your side of the case in order to win their support.
- You need to provide your official/case worker with all the information you have including those things you may wish to forget.
- While there are times when a member has been victimised by the employer for no good reason, in other cases you must consider what contribution, if any, you have brought to the

situation. All this information is important to your official/case worker.

- If you fail to give your official all the facts relating to your case, you run the risk of making your case impossible to resolve.
- Before you see your official/case worker, think about what you would like to achieve by way of an outcome.
- It may be that you are not sure what can be achieved but it is likely that you have some idea how the matter can be resolved. The official/case worker is likely to ask questions and take notes. Notes also remain confidential and will be locked away or kept secure. You may ask to see any notes that are kept on your by your official/case worker.
- Once you have explained your case and answered any questions that your official/case worker may have asked, you will then need to agree with him or her what happens next.
- On request you may receive in writing a copy of what you have agreed with your official/case worker and you should check this carefully to ensure that there are no errors.



# What can your CPSU Official do?

- How your official helps you will depend on the circumstances of the case and what you want or are prepared to accept.
- Your official will advise you on the options available to you, and the best course of action to take.
- It remains your decision if you wish to follow their advice, although, if you do not follow the advice given, there may be a limit as to how much help your official can then give you.
- They may be able to reassure you based on their experience of others in your position and advise you on what to do next.
- Official's can act on your behalf by writing to management for example.
- This can sometimes cause management to reflect on what they have done or intend to do, as they know that your official will pick up on any errors that they make. Sometimes getting management to reflect on a decision will be all you need to put the matter right.

- Your official can in most cases accompany you to a meeting with management to discuss your case and seek to negotiate an acceptable outcome with you. This can help resolve a matter quickly as exchanges of correspondence can take a long time.
- If you are facing a disciplinary meeting/hearing or have taken a grievance then you have a legal right to be accompanied by a whole time trade union official.

### **What if your case is against another member?**

It may be the case that you have a grievance against or feel you have been treated badly by a member of staff who is also a member of the CPSU.

This member may also approach the union, and is entitled to representation where appropriate. CPSU is very careful to be fair in such cases, and will ensure that confidential information is not shared.

### **What if the issues affect other people other than yourself?**

Some issues affect more than one person and it may be best to take these up as a collective complaint or grievance as many voices will be more effective than one.

Where possible, consider whether others have the same issues as you, before you meet with your local representative. If this is the case, your local representative may look to meet with all those affected along with your official and may discuss the option of taking forward a collective grievance.

# What is a Suitable Outcome?

This is a bit like asking ‘how long is a piece of string?’ in that it is different in every case and in every set of circumstances.

You and your official should discuss both:

1. What outcome you want
  2. What you would be prepared to accept as a compromise
- Bear in mind your official does not have a magic wand. Just by involving your official does not in itself guarantee that you will get what you want.
  - If management is able to concede what the representative is saying on your behalf or if you have discussed all aspects of the case and have reached a compromise then it is often acceptable to settle the case and that should be an end to it.
  - If you and your official are unable to agree with management a suitable outcome, then you will have to discuss the case again.
  - At this point the official will discuss with you what the next steps might be. Sometimes it means that you will have reached the end of the road with this case. Other times it may well be possible to appeal to a third party i.e. Rights Commissioner.

# What if CPSU cannot help?

CPSU will always try to assist members. Even where a member has contributed fully to the circumstances they are in, a CPSU official can play an important role in ensuring that the disciplinary action that is taken against that member is appropriate to the case and not inconsistent with other cases. Sometimes, after pursuing a case through the available procedures it may be that your official feels that the case has reached the end of the line and no further progress can be made.

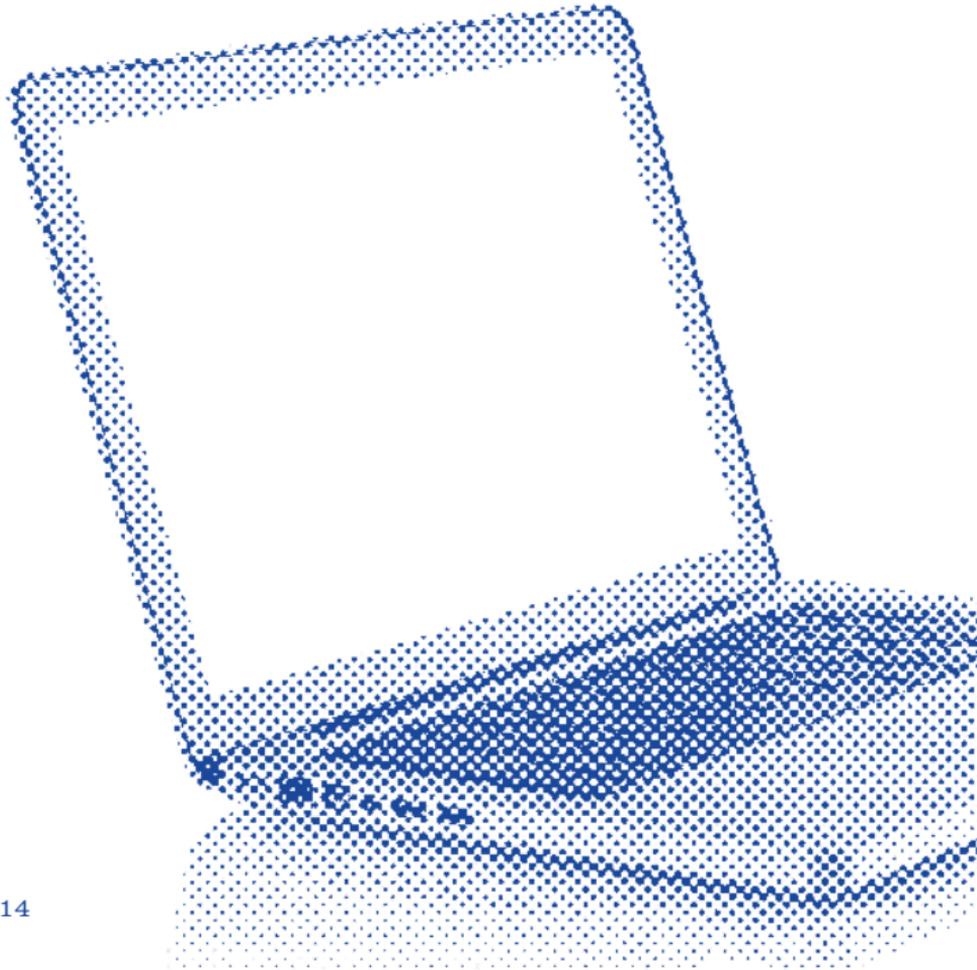
There are some circumstances where CPSU cannot help:

- If winning your case could adversely affect other member's terms and conditions then CPSU may advise you that they cannot continue to support it. This is highly unusual and only happens when a success in your circumstances would undermine others or agreements that have been fought for.
- If you refuse to take the advice of your head office official on how to pursue a case then your official may take a view that CPSU cannot continue to represent you in that case.
- You are always free to choose what action is taken but where this is thought to be inappropriate, your official may take the view that he or she can no longer help.
- If you choose to seek legal representation from a solicitor for example the CPSU will no longer act on your behalf.

# 8 Tips For Dealing With Problems At Work

- 01** Do not delay approaching your local representative. The earlier you bring the case to your rep the more likely the case can be resolved informally and speedily. Your first point of contact where possible should be your union rep and then your full time official if necessary.
- 02** Do keep notes and copies of all dates, letters and documents relating to the case. These will be important if the case takes time to resolve or has to be passed on to your full time official in headquarters for advice.
- 03** Do ensure you give your representative all the facts. At times you may have contributed to your own circumstance, but it is important that you are honest with your rep. What you tell your rep is in confidence but they must know everything, however damaging it may seem.
- 04** Do not assume they can move mountains. They may need to be honest with you and they don't have a magic wand. There is a vast resource of experience and expertise within the union that a rep can access with your permission.
- 05** Do be clear what your agreed objective is. The representative is there to act on your behalf and you should agree what actions they are to take.

- 06** Do not speak or write to management or anyone else about the case without your rep being aware in advance. This can hinder the progress your rep may be making.
- 07** Do remember that if you are asked to attend a disciplinary meeting/hearing or grievance hearing then you have a legal right to be accompanied by your representative and you should at all times use that right.
- 08** Do be patient. While you can expect your rep/head office official to deal with your case without undue delay, they may have other cases and work impacting on their time. Delays can occur also when management invoke formal procedures. Remember to keep in regular contact with your local rep or head office official.







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