



A Key Employment Law Update for Affable Partnership Clients

The Government has published an updated implementation timetable for the Plan to Make Work Pay and the Employment Rights Act. The reforms will be phased through 2026 and 2027. The dates below focus on the changes most relevant to employers. Future dates remain subject to parliamentary processes and may change.

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What's Changing and When

18 Dec 2025	Employment Rights Act 2025 received Royal Assent; most reforms to be phased in later.
18 Feb 2026	Initial trade union reforms took effect; new Day 1 paternity and unpaid parental leave notice arrangements began.
Apr 2026	Day 1 paternity and unpaid parental leave; SSP waiting period and earnings threshold removed; protective awards doubled; Fair Work Agency established; whistleblowing protections strengthened.
By 31 Aug 2026	Electronic and workplace balloting for statutory trade union ballots.
1 Oct 2026	Employment Tribunal claim time limits increase from 3 to 6 months (Scottish contract claims: 9 Nov 2026).
30 Oct 2026	'All reasonable steps' duty and third-party harassment protection; major trade union access, recognition and representative rights reforms.
Dec / end 2026	Seafarer protections and strengthened tipping law.
1 Jan 2027	Unfair dismissal qualifying period reduces to 6 months; compensatory award cap removed; fire and rehire protections commence.
During 2027	Guaranteed hours, flexible working, bereavement leave, pregnancy/new mother protection, NDAs, umbrella companies and further collective redundancy reforms.

Source: GOV.UK timeline update, published 16 July 2026.



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The highest-priority employer risks



Unfair Dismissal - A Material Shift in Risk

From 1 January 2027, employees will qualify for ordinary unfair dismissal protection after 6 months rather than 2 years. The statutory compensatory award cap will also be removed, increasing potential claim values.

What to do now:

- Move probation reviews earlier and do not wait until month six.
- Use clear objectives, evidence, support and written review records.
- Ensure managers know when to escalate concerns and seek advice.



Harassment and Third-Party Risk - 30 October 2026

Employers must take 'all reasonable steps' to prevent sexual harassment and must not permit harassment by third parties such as clients, customers or contractors. Policies alone will not be enough.

What to do now:

- Complete a risk assessment covering customers, contractors, events and remote work.
- Deliver practical training and keep attendance and refresher records.
- Create clear reporting routes and respond consistently to concerns.



SSP and Family Leave - Already in Force

Since 6 April 2026, Statutory Sick Pay applies from the first qualifying day and the Lower Earnings Limit has been removed. Paternity leave and unpaid parental leave are now Day 1 rights. Bereaved partners may also qualify for enhanced paternity leave.

What to do now:

- Update policies, payroll processes and manager guidance.
- Check contracts and handbooks do not contain outdated eligibility wording.



Fire and Rehire - 1 January 2027

New protections will significantly restrict dismissal and re-engagement where employees refuse contractual changes. Any proposed variation exercise will need a strong business rationale, genuine consultation and careful evidence.

What to do now:

- Start consultation early and consider alternatives.
- Take advice before issuing notice or presenting new terms as a fait accompli.



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Preparing your policies, processes and managers



Contracts and Policies - Time to Refresh

Contracts, handbooks and manager tools should reflect the phased changes. Priority areas include sickness absence, family leave, harassment, trade union rights, probation, dismissal, flexible working and zero-hours arrangements.

What to do now:

- Audit documents against the revised timeline.
- Plan staged updates rather than waiting for all 2027 detail to be finalised.



Guaranteed Hours, Flexible Working and 2027 Reforms

Further reforms are due during 2027, including guaranteed hours and notice rights, flexible working changes, bereavement leave, enhanced protection for pregnant employees and new mothers, and restrictions on misuse of NDAs.

What to do now:

- Map where variable-hours arrangements are used.
- Improve scheduling, record-keeping and decision-making now.



Fair Work Agency and Enforcement

The Fair Work Agency was established on 7 April 2026. Employers should expect more coordinated enforcement across areas such as pay, leave and worker rights, supported by stronger inspection and compliance powers.

What to do now:

- Keep accurate, accessible records.
- Be able to evidence compliance, not simply point to a policy.



Immediate Priorities

- ✓ Review probation timetables and manager capability before January 2027.
- ✓ Complete and document harassment risk assessments and training before 30 October 2026.
- ✓ Update SSP, family leave and sickness absence documentation now.
- ✓ Identify variable-hours workers and prepare for guaranteed-hours reform.
- ✓ Audit records, payroll and leave processes ahead of increased enforcement.
- ✓ Schedule policy updates and manager briefings around each implementation date.

Support: We can assist with audits, policy updates, manager training and practical implementation before each deadline.