

Basic Employment rights

Equal opportunities

The UK Equality Act 2010 promotes equal opportunities in the workplace. It bans discrimination on grounds of:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage/ civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Sex
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation

Pay and pension

Employees have a right to know how much they will be paid and how often. They are entitled to a written pay statement.

The UK sets a national minimum wage, that is the minimum amount per hour most workers are entitled to be paid.

From October 2012 employers in the UK, beginning with large companies, will be obliged to provide a pension for their employees. Employer and employee will contribute to the scheme.

Contract of employment

An employee is entitled to a contract of employment that sets out an employee's rights, responsibilities and duties. It doesn't have to be in writing but it is normal to receive a written statement within two months of beginning work.

Employers sometimes have collective agreements that have been negotiated with trade unions or staff associations. The agreement may apply to individual employees even though they are not members of the respective union or staff association.

A contract normally contains a statement of duty of mutual trust and confidence under which each party relies on the other to be honest and respectful.

If an employee has to change his/her place of work or the company is bought, terms and conditions are unchanged but the employee will receive an amended written statement confirming the new arrangements.

Working hours

Under the EU working time directive, working hours are limited to 48 hours per week averaged over 17 weeks. In some jobs such as the armed forces the directive doesn't apply. There are restrictions on the number of hours an employee may be required to work in a period of 24 hours.

Health and safety

Employers have a statutory duty to take care of the health and safety of employees. For example they must provide first aid facilities, means of escape in case of fire, protective clothing, where needed, ensure all machinery is safe, and rest breaks. In addition there are rules about cleanliness, noise, toilets, washing facilities, use of computers etc.

Employees have a responsibility for taking care of their own health and safety and for following company policies on health and safety.

Maternity/ paternity leave

A female employee eligible for maternity leave is entitled to 26 weeks of ordinary maternity leave and 26 weeks of additional maternity leave.

Maternity leave is paid for a minimum of 39 weeks. Payment for the first six weeks is at 90 per cent of gross weekly earnings without upper limit. For the next 33 weeks payment is, until April 2012 when it goes up, at £128.73 per week or 90% of gross weekly earnings whichever is the lower amount.

Male employees who are eligible for paternity leave are entitled to two consecutive weeks of ordinary paternity leave plus 25 weeks of additional paternity leave. Payment is at the rate of £128.73 per week or 90% of average earnings whichever is lower.

Holidays

An employee has a right to a minimum of 5.6 weeks paid leave per annum. This period may include bank and public holidays. The employer can control when holiday is taken.

Employees have the right to compassionate leave, that is, unpaid time off to deal with emergencies involving dependants.

Many employees are entitled to sick pay if off work because of sickness.

Pension

From October 2012, UK employers will be obliged to set up a pension scheme for their employees aged 22 and over. Employers will be obliged to make contributions on behalf of their employees. Employees will also be able to contribute. Contributions will be 3% of earnings (between £7,500 and £33,500 at 2008 values) for employers, 4% for employees, 1% tax relief from the government.

For more details see

www.adviceguide.org.uk/index/your_money/employment_index_ew/basic_rights_at_work.htm