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# New Employment Laws: Time to Update Your Employee Handbook?

When was the last time you checked that your employee handbook was up-to-date? Do you check that your policies are still appropriate on a regular basis, or has your handbook been gathering dust since it was drawn up? A good employee handbook is a resource that your employees and managers regularly rely upon and that is reviewed appropriately to ensure that it still complies with current legislation.

If you were thinking it was time to update your employee handbook (or are now having read the above), then now is a particularly good time to do so. Several key pieces of new legislation are shortly coming into force, and they will likely require significant updates to certain policies in your handbook. The changes introduced by this new legislation are discussed below.

## Flexible Working

Not one but two key pieces of legislation have been introduced to make significant changes to the way you should respond to flexible working requests.

The first piece of legislation is the Employment Relations ([Flexible Working](#)) Act 2023. The changes introduced are as follows:

- Two flexible working requests can now be made in any 12-month period (increased from one);
- You have a two-month time limit to deal with requests if no extension is agreed upon with the individual (decreased from three);
- Employees will no longer be required to explain what effect they think agreeing to their request would have on your business and how that might be dealt with, and
- Employers cannot refuse a request until they have consulted with the employee.

The second piece of legislation is the equally catchily titled Flexible Working (Amendment) Regulations 2023.

This makes flexible working requests a 'day one' right (removing the requirement for an employee to have 26 weeks' service before they can make a request).

## **Paternity Leave**

Changes are also afoot concerning the way that paternity leave can be requested and taken. The Paternity Leave ([Amendment](#)) Regulations 2024 introduce the following changes:

- The two-week paternity leave entitlement will be able to be taken as two separate one-week blocks (rather than just one week in total or two consecutive weeks);
- Paternity leave can be taken at any time in the 52 weeks after birth (extended from 56 days), and
- Only 28 days' notice is needed to take parental leave (reduced from 15 weeks before the Expected Week of Childbirth).

## **Carer's Leave**

The final key change to note is the introduction of the Carer's Leave Act 2024. This brings with it a new right for employees to take unpaid leave to care for a dependant with a long-term care requirement. The takeaways from this new entitlement are that:

- It's a 'day one' right;
- The requests can be made in consecutive or non-consecutive half days or full days;
- You can require that notice to take the leave be given in writing;
- The notice must be at least twice the amount of leave being requested or, if longer, three days' notice and
- You are able to postpone a request if it will cause serious disruption to your business.

Those requesting such leave will be protected from detriment and/or dismissal because they are taking, or have applied to take, carer's leave.

## When will these changes happen?

These changes will all come into effect from 6 April 2024. The bottom line is that, if you've not already done so, your existing policies will need to be updated to reflect these changes, and you may well need a new policy or two as well. There's a significant risk in not updating your handbook and policies, as failures to properly comply with flexible working and family-friendly legislation can lead to very expensive discrimination claims.

If you have any questions about how these changes may affect your business or want to speak to us about reviewing and updating your employee handbook, please contact our expert [employment solicitors](#) by emailing [online.enquiries@la-law.com](mailto:online.enquiries@la-law.com).