

2026 KEY UK EMPLOYMENT LAW CHANGES

As an employer, keeping pace with employment law developments is essential for effective workforce management. This factsheet summarises the key legislative changes taking effect in 2026 and their practical implications for your business. Note that implementation details for most of these changes below are subject to government consultation.

DISMISSAL PROTECTIONS FOR INDUSTRIAL ACTION



- Currently, employees who take part in industrial action (such as strikes) are protected from unfair dismissal for the first 12 weeks of that action. After this, dismissal may not be automatically unfair.
- From 18 February 2026, employees can participate in lawful industrial action for an unlimited period without fear of automatic dismissal, and can bring a claim without needing two years' service.

MINIMUM WAGE INCREASE



From 1 April 2026, the National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage (for those 21 and over) will increase as follows:

| | 21+ | 18-20 | Under 18 | Apprentice |
|------------|--------|--------|----------|------------|
| April 2025 | £12.21 | £10.00 | £7.55 | £7.55 |
| April 2026 | £12.71 | £10.85 | £8 | £8 |

PATERNITY LEAVE AND UNPAID PARENTAL LEAVE



From 6 April 2026:

- Paternity leave will become a day-one right, allowing notice from the first day of employment.
- Ordinary parental leave will also become a day-one right, removing the one-year service requirement.
- The restriction on taking paternity leave after shared parental leave will be removed.

PROCEDURAL CHANGES FOR TRADE UNION



From February 2026:

- **Strike notice period:** Unions must give 10 days' notice before industrial action (reduced from 14 days).
- **Ballot requirements:** A simple majority will be enough to approve industrial action, meaning more votes for than against. The extra voting thresholds for public sector unions will be removed.
- **Picketing:** The requirement to appoint a picket supervisor will be removed.
- **Mandate validity:** Ballots authorising industrial action will remain valid for 12 months (extended from 6 months).
- **Notice procedures:** Requirements for industrial action and

SICK PAY



These changes take effect on 6 April 2026:

- Statutory sick pay will be paid from the first day of illness.
- The lower earnings limit will be removed, so no minimum income is required to qualify.
- SSP will be the lower of 80% of average weekly earnings or the standard SSP rates.

COLLECTIVE REDUNDANCY PROTECTIVE AWARD



The maximum protective award for failing to consult on collective redundancies will double from 90 to 180 days' pay from 6 April 2026.

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WHISTLEBLOWING AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT



From April 2026, sexual harassment will qualify as a protected disclosure under whistleblowing law, giving workers protection from unfair treatment or dismissal when they report it.

GENDER PAY GAP AND MENOPAUSE PLANS



From April 2026, employers will need to create action plans for menopause support and gender pay gaps. These will be voluntary initially, becoming mandatory in 2027.

TRADE UNION CHANGES



From 6 April 2026:

- Trade unions will have a simpler route to workplace recognition.
- Union members will be able to vote electronically.
- The 50% turnout threshold for industrial action ballots will be removed, likely shortly after 6 April.

FAIR WORK AGENCY



A new Fair Work Agency will combine existing enforcement bodies and enforce employment rights, including holiday pay and statutory sick pay.

DISMISSAL AND REHIRE ('FIRE AND REHIRE')



From October 2026, dismissing and then rehiring employees on worse terms will automatically constitute unfair dismissal in most cases.

TIPPING



From October 2026, employers must:

- Consult with workers or their representatives before creating a tipping policy.
- Update their tipping policy every 3 years.

HARASSMENT



From October 2026:

- Employers will be liable for third-party harassment unless they take all reasonable steps to prevent it.
- They must take all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment.
- NDAs are expected to be limited so they cannot stop workers reporting harassment or discrimination.

EMPLOYMENT TRIBUNAL TIME LIMITS



The time limit for making employment tribunal claims will increase from 3 months to 6 months for all claims.

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ADDITIONAL TRADE UNION CHANGES



From October 2026:

- Employers must inform workers of their right to join a trade union.
- Updated rules on trade union workplace access rights.
- New right to reasonable accommodation and facilities for trade union representatives.
- New right to time off for union equality representatives.

Acas Consultation on Trade Union Duties and Activities Deadline: 17 March 2026

- **Protection Against Detriment for Industrial Action:** Workers taking part in industrial action will be protected against unfavourable treatment and unfair dismissal.
- **Adult Social Care Negotiating Body:** A new negotiating body for adult social care will be established.

DECEMBER 2026 CHANGE



Mandatory Seafarer's Charter: A new mandatory charter for seafarers will introduce higher standards for health and safety, pay, job security and rest breaks.

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