



Hands-On HR

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Employment Update

February 2007

Welcome to 2007! I thought I would leave January alone for you to consider your own business needs, but as February is quickly passing its time to update you on matters for employers big and small.

Advanced warning

Minimum wage – Tony Woodley, general secretary of the T&G union has called for the national minimum wage to be increased from £5.35 to £7.50 per hour. Whilst this is not likely to happen at the review in October 2007, the level is expected to reach £5.60 per hour.

Statutory holiday entitlement – the government recently announced proposals to increase the minimum statutory holiday entitlement for UK workers from 20 to 28 days a year. Public consultation on these proposals is due to close on 13th April 2007 so watch this space for an update!

Bullying in the workplace

The recent media hype surrounding the alleged bullying of contestant Shilpa Shetty in the *Celebrity Big Brother* house caused a phenomenal increase in the number of calls received by the National Bullying Helpline – most of them from the general public who related the TV scenes to experiences in their workplace. Here are some tips to employers who suspect Big Brother-style bullying at work:

- Be alert to any sign of discrimination or bullying and investigate immediately. Otherwise the employer – not just the bully – could be held liable
- If you suspect someone is being bullied, take them aside privately and ask how they are feeling.
- In a serious case, it may be appropriate to suspend the person who has been accused of carrying out the bullying, or move them to another department whilst the investigation takes place
- Gather witness statements from other colleagues before commencing any formal proceedings against the alleged bully. It is important to consider not just the employee rights of the “victim”, but also of the accused employee.

Legal statistics

The current tribunal awards are updated in line with the Retail Price Index each February. Here are the new rates effective from February 1st 2007:

- Limits on pay for award calculations – 1 day £19.60, 1 week £310
- Maximum basic award for unfair dismissal – 30 weeks’ pay or £9,300
- Maximum compensatory award for unfair dismissal (excluding health and safety or whistleblowing which is uncapped) - £60,600
- Minimum basic award for dismissal on trade union, health and safety, working time or pension trustee grounds - £6,600
- Maximum award for breach of contract cases - £25,000

Make selection decisions more risk-free

Did you know that I am a trained assessor and provider of both Ability (aptitude tests such as numerical, verbal and mechanical reasoning) and Personality Profiles? Either or both are essential when undertaking both recruitment decisions and development programmes with staff at all levels. Call me for more details.

So, things to do

- *Ensure any redundancy calculations or tribunal awards take account of the new rates*