

HR UPDATE

In this issue:

- EMPLOYMENT LAW CHANGES: NEW UNFAIR DISMISSAL RIGHTS FROM JULY 2026 - WHAT EMPLOYERS NEED TO DO NOW
- THE FAIR WORK AGENCY: NEW ENFORCEMENT POWERS AND WHY RECORD-KEEPING MATTERS MORE THAN EVER
- MEN'S HEALTH AT WORK: WHY IT'S TIME TO START THE CONVERSATION
- LATEST NEWS: GOVERNMENT GRANTS OF UP TO £3,000 FOR HIRING YOUNG WORKERS
- SUPPORTING WORKING CARERS: UNDERSTANDING YOUR OBLIGATIONS AND RETAINING VALUABLE EMPLOYEES
- QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

WELCOME

Hi and welcome to the latest newsletter.

June has brought a mix of record-breaking temperatures, policy changes and a steady flow of questions from employers trying to keep on top of what's coming next.

This month's update is a bit of a practical one. We're looking ahead to some important employment law changes landing later this year, what the new Fair Work Agency actually means in reality, and why men's health at work is still being overlooked in too many businesses.

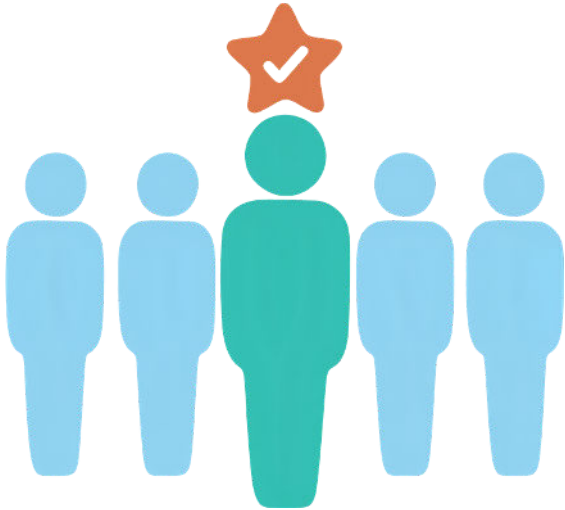
We've also included some useful updates on government hiring support, caring responsibilities in the workplace, and a few common HR questions we're being asked right now.

As always, the aim is to keep things clear, relevant and useful, but please let us know if you have any questions.

All the best,

Claire





Hiring anyone after 1st July? You'll need to read this...

From 1 July 2026, any new employee will be able to bring an ordinary unfair dismissal claim after just 6 months of service. The current 2 year qualifying period will no longer apply to new starters from that date.

In practical terms, this is a significant shift in how probation periods need to be used.

Probation can no longer be treated as a loose "get to know them" period. It needs to function as a structured, documented process that shows how performance and conduct have been managed from day one. Many businesses currently run 6 month probation periods, but don't consistently record concerns or progress. That approach becomes much riskier under the new rules.

From July 2026 onwards, if someone is dismissed in month 7 and there is limited evidence of structured feedback, clear expectations or improvement support, the risk of a successful claim increases significantly.

The strongest position for employers will be those who treat probation as an active process rather than a formality. That includes setting expectations clearly at the start, holding regular review conversations, documenting concerns early and making a fair, evidenced decision at the end of probation. In many cases, the process itself is already there, it's the documentation that needs tightening.

If you're hiring now or planning to hire soon, it's worth reviewing your probation process before the change comes in. We can help you put a simple, practical framework in place that works in real life, not just on paper. Get in touch if you'd like to talk it through.

6-month unfair dismissal checklist

What you need to decide, fix and do in the right order

- 1 **Set your probation strategy**
Set to 4 months, decide when to review and who's responsible.
- 2 **Update your contracts**
Make sure that they reflect how you actually manage probation.
- 3 **Tighten up how you hire**
Define the role clearly and use a consistent process.
- 4 **Set clear expectations from day one**
Explain what good looks like and set early targets.
- 5 **Manage performance properly during probation**
Hold regular check-ins, document issues early, keep records.
- 6 **Make a decision before month 6**
Review before the end of the probation period and make a clear call: keep, extend (slightly) or exit.



Did you know?

The Fair Work Agency is now LIVE



**Fair Work
Agency**

The Fair Work Agency launched on 7 April 2026, bringing together several existing enforcement bodies into one organisation with significantly more powers. It can inspect workplaces, review employment records going back 6 years, interview workers, and bring tribunal claims on behalf of employees.

Penalties for underpayment can reach up to 200% of the unpaid amount, capped at £20,000 per employee, with the added risk of public naming for non-compliant businesses.

Importantly, many investigations are expected to stem from technical errors rather than intentional wrongdoing. Common issues like holiday pay miscalculations or incomplete working time records are likely to be key triggers.

From 6 April, employers are also legally required to keep accurate holiday pay and annual leave records, making this an immediate area to focus on. For most businesses, this isn't about overhauling everything, it's about tightening up record-keeping and making sure the basics are consistently right.

Millions of workers are juggling jobs with unpaid care, and employers are losing them



Around five million people in the UK are balancing paid work with unpaid caring responsibilities for a family member or friend.

According to Carers UK, around 600 people a day leave work because they can't manage both.

The Carer's Leave Act 2023 gives employees the right to 1 week's unpaid leave, but more than half of working carers say they can't afford to take it. For employers, this often shows up as increased absence, reduced availability, or unexpected resignations.

Understanding your obligations, and offering flexibility where possible, can make a real difference in retaining experienced staff.

LATEST NEWS

Government offers employers up to £3,000 to hire young workers

The government has introduced a Youth Jobs Grant offering £3,000 for each unemployed 18-24-year-old hired, provided they have been out of work for at least six months.

Small employers may also be eligible for an additional £2,000 for each new apprentice aged 16-24.

With nearly one million young people currently not in education, employment or training, the scheme is designed to widen access to talent while supporting onboarding costs. If you're recruiting, it's worth checking eligibility before you hire.



Men's Health At Work: How to do better



Men's Health Week ran from 15 - 21 June, and it's a useful moment to reflect on something that often goes unspoken in the workplace.

When was the last time a male employee in your business told you they were struggling? For many employers, the honest answer is "rarely" or "never". But that doesn't necessarily mean there isn't an issue.

A few realities worth acknowledging:

- Men account for around 75% of suicides in the UK
- In construction alone, around 700 workers die by suicide each year
- Men are statistically less likely to seek help or disclose mental health concerns at work

At the same time, workplace wellbeing strategies have understandably focused heavily on areas like menopause support and maternal health in recent years. Men's health hasn't had the same visibility, and the gap is showing. In smaller businesses especially, issues can go unnoticed without structured support in place, such as regular one-to-ones or trained managers who know what to look for.

And the impact is real: poor mental health drives absence, disengagement and ultimately higher turnover costs. This doesn't need to be complicated. Small steps make a difference; regular check-ins that go beyond tasks, watching for changes in behaviour, managing workload pressures, and signposting support such as Mind, Samaritans or CALM where needed.

If you'd like help thinking about what practical wellbeing support could look like in a small business, we're happy to help.

Think a bad hire is just a waste of time? Think again.

A single bad hire at mid-manager level could cost a business over £132,000, more than three times an average £42k salary, according to the Recruitment and Employment Confederation.

And from July 2026, the risk doesn't just sit with cost. With ordinary unfair dismissal rights available after just 6 months, a poorly managed hire could also escalate into a tribunal claim if expectations, feedback and process haven't been properly documented.

This is why getting recruitment and probation right from the start matters more than ever.

£132,000+

The real cost of one bad hire
at mid-manager level

(Source: Recruitment & Employment Confederation)



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Top HR Questions

Can an employee raise a grievance during their probation period?

Yes. There's no legal rule that prevents an employee from raising a grievance during probation. You're still required to take it seriously and follow a fair process.

Ignoring or dismissing a grievance because someone is on probation creates risk, particularly if the employee later claims the outcome of their probation was influenced by the fact that they raised one.

Do I have to let staff work flexibly during school holidays?

You don't have an automatic obligation to accommodate flexible working requests around school holidays. Employees may also have statutory rights to take parental leave to care for a child, provided they meet the eligibility requirements. You should therefore consider whether parental leave, annual leave or another appropriate form of leave may better meet the employee's needs, alongside considering any flexible working request.

Can I dismiss someone during their probation period under the new rules?

Yes, but the rules are changing. From 1 January 2027, employees will gain ordinary unfair dismissal rights after 6 months rather than 2 years. If someone is still in their probation period when they hit that 6-month mark, you'll need a fair reason and a fair process to dismiss them. Review your probation periods now and make sure that any concerns are raised well before the 6-month point. You may be better to bring your probation period end point forward, e.g. to 4 months.

One of my employees has asked to reduce their hours to care for a parent. What are my obligations?

Any employee has the right to make a flexible working request from day 1 and you must deal with it in a reasonable manner.

You can refuse a request, but only for one of the 8 business reasons set out in law. You should also be aware that carers now have a right to 1 week of unpaid carer's leave per year under the Carer's Leave Act 2023. Consider the request carefully and document your decision.

With lots of Employment Rights changes coming into effect, how can I make sure I'm getting them right?

There's a lot changing over the next year, and it can be difficult to know what applies now, what's coming later, and what actually needs action in your business.

The simplest way to stay on top of it is to get advice early rather than trying to unpick it after something has already gone wrong.

Get in touch with us, we can help you make sense of the changes and put practical, compliant processes in place.

With over 20 years' experience in HR, we support businesses to cut through the noise and focus on what actually matters in day-to-day management.

