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2015 employment law archive

Every year brings with it numerous legislative changes and, as our annual round up of employment law changes shows, 2015 will certainly be no different.

Despite the coalition's efforts to cut red tape, its final year in government has delivered what legal experts agree is one of the most complex sets of regulations that employers have ever had to handle. The implementation of shared parental leave and pay, which provides greater flexibility for parents to care for a child throughout its first year, will dominate the year ahead.

Also coming up is: the new occupational health service to help employees return to work after a long-term sickness absence of four weeks or more; a change to the child's age limit for parental leave; alterations to certain pension restrictions; and the usual shifts in the statutory rates of pay.

Read our guide to see what further significant employment law changes to expect in the year ahead. For more detail, click on the title of each new piece of legislation.

[1. Shared parental leave and pay begins](#)

The long-awaited shared parental leave and pay is introduced that will provide greater flexibility in how parents share the care of their child in its first year. It will be available to couples with a baby due, or children placed for adoption, on or after 5 April 2015.

The parents will be able to share the mother's maternity leave and, if available, maternity pay. Shared parental leave will also be available to employees who are, or

expect to be, the parents of a child under a parental order, where the child's expected week of birth begins on or after 5 April 2015. [Visit our employer's guide for further detail.](#)

[2. Changes to statutory adoption leave and pay](#)

The Paternity and Adoption Leave (Amendment) Regulations 2014 make significant changes to adoption leave. The 26-week qualifying period to be eligible to take adoption leave will be removed, bringing it into line with the eligibility requirements for maternity leave.

The Children and Families Act 2014 brings statutory adoption pay into line with statutory maternity pay by setting it at 90% of average weekly earnings for the first six weeks.

Surrogate parents will also become eligible for adoption leave. The leave will be available to employees who are, or expect to be, the parents of a child under a parental order, where the child's expected week of birth begins on or after 5 April 2015.

The Paternity and Adoption Leave (Amendment) (No 2) Regulations 2014 also introduce a new right for local authority parents who are prospective adopters to take adoption leave.

[3. New right to take time off to attend adoption appointments](#)

The Children and Families Act 2013 introduces a new right to attend adoption appointments. The main adopter will be able to take time off to attend up to five, while the secondary adopter will be entitled to take time off for up to two such appointments.

[4. Child's age limit for parental leave raises to 18](#)

Shared parental leave is unrelated to parental leave, the statutory right to a period of unpaid leave that may be taken by a parent during the first five years of the child's life.

From 5 April 2015, the age limit for the child will increase from five to 18 years. Parents with sufficient qualifying service will have the right to 18 weeks' unpaid parental leave up to the child's 18th birthday.

[5. New Fit for Work service available for employees with sickness absence of four weeks or more](#)

The new Fit for Work service is scheduled to be introduced in England and Wales over the next year, offering employers access to free occupational assistance for employees who have been off sick for four weeks or more.

The service can also be used to provide more generalised open-access occupational health advice to employees, employers and general practitioners, regardless of the duration of any sickness.

Employers will be able to claim up to £500 tax relief on payments for medical treatment for their employees where the treatment has been recommended under the new scheme.

[6. Removal of restrictions on defined-contribution pension schemes](#)

There will be the removal of certain restrictions in respect of how individuals can draw their benefits from their defined-contribution pension pots after age 55, from April 2015.

[7. Statutory maternity pay, ordinary paternity pay and adoption pay increase](#)

Employment law changes 2015

[All current and, where available, future statutory rates are listed here](#)

The rates of statutory maternity, ordinary statutory paternity pay and statutory adoption pay will increase on 5 April 2015.

[8. Statutory sick pay increases](#)

The standard rate of statutory sick pay increases on 6 April 2015.

[9. National minimum wage rates](#)

The Government submitted evidence to the Low Pay Commission (LPC) on 15 October 2014, which will be used to help determine the national minimum wage rates that apply from 1 October 2015. The LPC will submit its report with its recommendations on national minimum wage rates to the Government in February 2015.

Source: Personnel Today