

March 2016

Modernising parental leave

Changes to modernise the parental leave scheme will come into effect on 1 April 2016. These changes will provide not only an extension to the duration of paid parental leave from 16 to 18 weeks but also provide greater flexibility along with extending who can benefit from the scheme.

The key changes include:

- Extending parental leave to those without regular working hours and allowing employees who have recently changed jobs.
- Extending the scheme to a wider group of primary carers
- Allowing greater flexibility for when workers can take unpaid parental leave
- The introduction of “Keeping in Touch” hours
- Extending unpaid leave to workers who have been with their employer for more than six months but less than 12
- Allowing workers to resign and still receive paid parental leave

The changes that will have the greatest impact on employers are;

Allowing workers to take unpaid parental leave flexibly rather than in one continuous block, employees will be able to return to work for a period and take the remainder of their leave later in the year. This will require agreement with the employer and parents must take any remaining unpaid leave before the child is one year old.

The introduction of “Keeping in Touch” days will allow workers to work up to 40 hours during the 18 weeks of paid leave. These hours could be used to keep up with skills development, training or completing a work handover and can help the parent ease back into work. Keeping in Touch days are not compulsory and again require mutual agreement for their use. The child will need to be at least four weeks old before the Keeping in Touch days can be used.

Workers who have been with their employer for more than six months but less than 12 will be able to take unpaid leave in addition to their paid leave, up to a total period of six months.

By allowing workers to resign and still receive payments will give greater choice to employees and give certainty to employers. It will allow employers to recruit a permanent replacement, rather than a temporary replacement, where the employee has no intention of returning.

If you would like more information please contact Rory Noorland on 07 889 8850