Business News England

Welcome to our round up of the latest business news for our clients. Please contact us if you want to talk about how these updates affect your business. We are here to support you!

Government Unveils Roadmap for Employment Rights Bill

Following publication of the Employment Rights Bill in October 2024, the government has published a comprehensive implementation roadmap. The roadmap outlines a phased timeline for one of the most significant overhauls of UK employment law in decades.

Aimed at raising living standards and strengthening workplace protections, it’s estimated that the reforms will affect around 15 million workers, or half of the UK workforce.

The legislation is part of the Government’s plan to Make Work Pay, as well as its Plan for Change. It introduces new entitlements for employees, creates new enforcement mechanisms, and sets out clearer obligations for employers.

The Bill, which has passed through the House of Commons, is now at the Report Stage in the House of Lords.

Key Changes and Implementation Timeline

The Employment Rights Bill will be introduced in phases, beginning shortly after its passage through Parliament and extending into 2027. The government has said this staged approach is intended to give businesses the clarity and lead time needed to plan and adjust.

Here’s a broad outline of when key changes are likely to take effect.

Immediate (once granted Royal Assent):

- Repeal of the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023 and most of the Trade Union Act 2016.
- Protections against dismissal for workers involved in industrial action.

From April 2026:

- Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) eligibility extended by removing the lower earnings limit and waiting period.
- Day one rights to paternity leave and unpaid parental leave.
- New whistleblowing protections.
- Creation of the Fair Work Agency to enforce employment rights.
- Doubling the maximum period of the protective award in cases of collective redundancy.

- A package of trade union measures, including simplifying recognition processes and electronic and workplace ballots.

From October 2026:

- Legislation to ban fire and rehire practices.
- Establishment of a fair pay agreement negotiating body for adult social care in England.
- Strengthened tipping laws, requiring consultation with workers on fair distribution.
- Employers required to take “all reasonable steps” to prevent sexual harassment.
- New duties on employers to prevent third-party harassment.
- Further trade union rights and protections, including stronger safeguards for union reps.

In 2027:

- Enhanced dismissal protections for pregnant women and new mothers.
- Bereavement leave for workers.
- End to exploitative zero-hours contracts, with requirements for predictable hours.
- ‘Day one’ rights to unfair dismissal protection.
- Expanded access to flexible working arrangements.
- Gender pay gap and menopause action plans (to be introduced on a voluntary basis in April 2026).
- Clarified requirements for preventing workplace harassment.
- A modern framework for industrial relations.

Business Implications

For employers, the roadmap presents a number of changes that will require preparing for and adapting to over the coming months and years. The Government has stated it will publish detailed guidance ahead of each implementation date, alongside additional support via organisations such as Acas.

The reforms are likely to increase employers’ responsibilities in areas such as record-keeping, employee relations, and compliance with new procedural standards. Hospitality, social care, and retail businesses, which often rely on flexible contracts or lower-paid workforces, may experience particular impacts.

With some measures coming into effect from April 2026, you may wish to begin reviewing your HR strategies, employment contracts, and risk management practices now.

The roadmap also signals a shift in the relationship between employers and trade unions, with increased access rights and simplified processes for recognition and balloting. The expansion of employment protections from day one represents a significant departure from the current law.

Looking Ahead

Having clear timelines and advance publication of guidance should help with navigating the changes. There are also indications that there will be further consultations in some areas to make sure that the measures implemented will be practical.

For further information and full timelines, see:
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/implementing-the-employment-rights-bill

Progress as Companies House Reforms Target Economic Crime

Companies House is undergoing a major transformation following the introduction of the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023 (ECCTA). Backed by new legislative powers, the agency is shifting from a passive registrar to an active gatekeeper - taking direct action against fraud, money laundering, and misuse of the UK's corporate framework.

A newly published progress report highlights the scale and impact of this reform so far. Key achievements include:

- Querying or removing misleading or false information affecting over 100,000 companies.

- Blocking over 10,000 suspicious company applications, including mass incorporations at single addresses - a known red flag for money laundering.

- Supporting law enforcement efforts to identify around £50 million in UK property tied to organised crime.

- Collaborating internationally in Europol's Asset Sprint to help seize criminal assets globally.

- Issuing around 850 intelligence reports to UK law enforcement agencies using new internal capabilities.

Mandatory Identity Verification

The changes being brought about by the ECCTA mark a new era of corporate regulation in the UK. While the new measures are primarily aimed at deterring criminal activity, they also raise the bar for all companies in terms of compliance and the accuracy of information filed with Companies House.

A key upcoming development is mandatory identity verification for company directors and persons with significant control (PSCs) - this is expected to become mandatory by autumn 2025. However, Companies House have already begun contacting many companies to encourage voluntarily starting the process early.

How We Can Help

Our company secretarial services are designed to help businesses stay compliant and adapt to these evolving requirements with confidence. Whether you need support with director and PSC filings, maintaining statutory registers, or preparing for the upcoming identity verification rules, we can help you stay on the right side of regulation while focusing on what matters most - running your business.

If you're concerned about how these changes may affect your company, or simply want to ensure you're fully prepared, get in touch with our team today. We will be happy to help you!

See: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-powers-yield-real-world-impact-in-companies-house-economic-crime-crackdown

Big Changes Could Be Coming to Parental Leave – What Employers Should Know

The government has launched a full review of the UK's parental leave and pay system, aiming to make it fairer, simpler and better suited to the needs of modern families.

This is part of the government's wider 'Plan to Make Work Pay, and it could lead to significant reforms in how maternity, paternity and shared parental leave work – with the potential to affect businesses and employers across the country.

Why now?

The review comes in response to growing concern that the current system is complicated and unaffordable for many families – especially new fathers and partners. Currently, one in three dads don't take paternity leave, often because they simply can't afford to. Shared parental leave is available but uptake remains very low.

What's being reviewed?

The Government will be looking at the whole parental leave system, from maternity and paternity leave through to shared parental leave. The goal is to make the system work better for both parents and employers.

What this might mean for you

If you employ staff, particularly younger adults or growing families, this review could eventually lead to changes in your statutory obligations. It might mean:

- Higher levels of statutory pay
- Longer periods of paid leave for both parents
- Changes to how shared leave works and is applied for

But it could also mean simpler rules to navigate, which would be welcome for many employers!

It's worth keeping in mind that these changes won't happen overnight. The review will gather views from parents, businesses and experts across the country before any new policies are introduced.

What can you do now?

Right now, there's no action required – but it's worth keeping this on your radar. Here are a few tips:

- Stay informed: If draft proposals come out later this year, there may be a chance to have your say.

- Review your current policies: Make sure your employee handbook or contracts reflect the current legal entitlements correctly – especially if you haven't looked at them in a while.

- Be prepared for change: While we don't know the final shape of any reforms, there's a clear signal that better support for working parents is a priority for the Government.

See: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-review-of-parental-leave-launched

UK House Prices See Sharp Monthly Drop Amid Stamp Duty Reforms

UK house prices recorded their steepest monthly fall in over two years in June, according to the latest data from mortgage lender Nationwide. Prices declined by 0.8%, marking the largest drop since February 2023.

While annual growth remained positive at 2.1%, this was the slowest year-on-year increase in nearly 12 months. The downturn appears to reflect cooling demand in the wake of stamp duty threshold changes introduced in April.

Stamp Duty Changes and Market Adjustment

The stamp duty reforms mean that homebuyers in England and Northern Ireland now start paying the tax on properties over £125,000, down from the previous threshold of £250,000. First-time buyers also saw their exemption limit reduced, which has likely dampened enthusiasm, especially in lower to mid-range property brackets.

The reforms prompted a surge in transactions before the deadline, leading to a temporary drop-off in activity afterward - a trend many analysts suggest will be short-lived.

Outlook for the Housing Market

Despite the June dip, forecasters including Nationwide expect activity to rebound in the coming months. Factors supporting the market include:

- Low unemployment
- Earnings continuing to outpace inflation
- Potential interest rate cuts from the Bank of England later this year

Recent increases in mortgage approvals point toward a possible stabilisation or recovery in the second half of the year.

Implications for Businesses

For businesses, the short-term dip in house prices and transaction volumes may signal temporary caution among consumers.

However, the broader economic indicators suggest that this is more of a pause than a downturn.

See: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c9dggnl4391o

Farm Inspections to Increase by 50% as Environment Agency Steps Up Regulation and Support

Farm businesses are set to face greater scrutiny from the Environment Agency (EA) following an announcement that the number of annual inspections will increase by around 50% over the next four years. The move is part of a wider government strategy to improve environmental performance in agriculture and reduce pollution from farming activities.

Under the new plan, the number of farm inspections is expected to reach 6,000 per year by 2029.

A Stronger Regulatory Framework

The EA's inspection programme focuses on enforcing environmental laws, including those around issues such as fertiliser use, slurry storage, soil health, and runoff into watercourses. While the core aim is to reduce pollution and protect rivers, lakes and wildlife, the shift also signals a firmer approach to compliance, with additional capacity for enforcement in cases of serious or repeated non-compliance.

Farms that present the highest risk to water quality will be prioritised. These will include areas where agricultural activity has already affected rivers or groundwater, or where large volumes of slurry and waste are handled.

What This Means for Farmers

For farmers, the implications are mixed. On one hand, most are interested in protecting the environment, however an increase in inspections is likely to be time-consuming or burdensome, particularly if you are already working to tight margins.

However, the Environment Agency has said the additional funding will help them to provide more advisory support, clearer guidance, and stronger links to farm networks and supply chains. This could mean a more supportive approach from the Environment Agency where they find a willingness to respond to advice.

Next Steps

For farm businesses, the coming years are likely to bring more regulatory engagement and higher expectations around environmental standards. Those already investing in sustainable practices may welcome the advisory elements of the changes, while others may need to reassess their compliance strategies to avoid enforcement actions as inspections ramp up.

In practical terms, now may be a good time for you to review your current practices, identify any potential risks, and make use of available support and guidance.

See: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-boost-to-cut-agricultural-pollution

IPO Issues New Guidance on Trade Mark Specifications Following Supreme Court Ruling

The UK Intellectual Property Office (IPO) has issued updated guidance for trade mark applicants following a key Supreme Court judgment in the case of SkyKick UK Ltd and another v Sky Ltd and others. The decision, which focused on the concept of bad faith in trade mark filings, has prompted immediate changes to how trade mark applications will be examined.

The IPO’s new Practice Amendment Notice (PAN 1/25) clarifies expectations around trade mark specifications and outlines when applicants may face scrutiny over overly broad claims.

Key Points for Applicants

- Examiners will now assess whether claimed specifications are “manifestly and self-evidently broad” and may raise objections on grounds of bad faith if no genuine intention to use the trade mark across the full range of claimed goods or services is apparent.

- Applications covering all goods in Class 9, which covers a significant range of software and tech products, or all 45 trade mark classes are likely to trigger automatic objections.

- Applicants will have two months to respond to objections by either narrowing the specification or providing a clear commercial justification.

What This Means for Your Trade Mark Strategy

Businesses applying for trade marks should now:

- Ensure specifications reflect actual or planned business activity.
- Avoid catch-all terms unless they can be justified.
- Prepare to explain broad filings if challenged.

Support and Advice

These changes are designed to reduce misuse of the trade mark register and improve clarity for all users. However, they may also increase the need for early strategic thinking and professional input when preparing applications.

If you're planning to file a trade mark or need to review a recent application in light of the new guidance, it may be worth speaking with a Chartered Trade Mark Attorney. Please speak to us if you would like a recommendation.

See: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/guidance-for-trade-mark-applicants-following-judgment-in-skykick-v-sky

If you would like any further information, please contact us at info@branstonadams.co.uk or call 01252 728598