

Helpline 08457 47 47 47

08456 06 16 00
helpline for textphone users

08702 42 90 90
for ordering Acas publications

08456 00 34 44
for questions on managing
equality in the workplace

Rights at work

Acas main offices

Scotland
151 West George Street, Glasgow G2 7JJ

North West
Commercial Union House,
2-10 Albert Square, Manchester M60 8AD

Pavilion 1, The Matchworks, Speke Road,
Speke, Liverpool L19 2PH

North East
Cross House, Westgate Road,
Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 4XX

Yorkshire & Humber
The Cube, 123 Albion Street,
Leeds LS2 8ER

West Midlands
Warwick House, 6 Highfield Road,
Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 3ED

East Midlands
Lancaster House, 10 Sherwood Rise,
Nottingham NG7 6JE

East of England
Ross House, Kempson Way, Suffolk
Business Park, Bury St. Edmunds,
Suffolk IP32 7AR

Wales
3 Purbeck House, Lambourne Crescent,
Llanishen, Cardiff CF14 5GJ

London
22nd & 23rd Floors, Euston Tower,
286 Euston Road, London NW1 3JJ

South West
The Waterfront, Welsh Back,
Bristol BS1 4SB

South East
Westminster House, 125 Fleet Road,
Fleet, Hampshire GU51 3QL

Suites 3-5, Business Centre,
1-7 Commercial Road, Paddock Wood,
Kent TN12 6EN

Head Office
Brandon House,
180 Borough High Street,
London SE1 1LW

www.acas.org.uk

discipline, grievances and dismissals
equality and discrimination
information and consultation
parents at work
pay
time off
> trade unions and representation



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

12/04

Ref: RW07

inform

advise

train

work
with you

Acas can help *with your employment relations needs*

Every year Acas helps employers and employees from thousands of workplaces. That means we keep right up to date with today's employment relations issues – such as discipline and grievance handling, preventing discrimination and communicating effectively in workplaces. Make the most of our practical experience for your organisation – find out what we can do for you.

We inform

We answer your questions, give you the facts you need and talk through your options. You can then make informed decisions. Contact us to keep on top of what employment rights legislation means in practice – before it gets on top of you. Call our helpline 08457 47 47 47 or visit our website www.acas.org.uk.

We advise and guide

We give you practical know-how on setting up and keeping good relations in your organisation. Look at our publications on the website or ask our helpline to put you in touch with your local Acas adviser. Our Equality Direct helpline 08456 00 34 44 advises on equality issues, such as discrimination.

We train

From a two-hour session on the key points of new legislation or employing people to courses specially designed for people in your organisation, we offer training to suit you. Look on the website for what is coming up in your area and to book a place or talk to your local Acas office about our tailored services.

We work with you

We offer hands-on practical help and support to tackle issues in your business with you. This might be through one of our well-known problem-solving services. Or a programme we have worked out together to put your business firmly on track for effective employment relations. You will meet your Acas adviser and discuss exactly what is needed before giving any go-ahead.

Trade Unions and Representation

What is this leaflet for?

This leaflet gives a brief outline of rights to trade union membership and representation. It includes basic information:

- Who is entitled to the rights
- How people complain if they are denied a right they believe they are entitled to.

For detailed information about a particular right, visit www.acas.org.uk.

Rights covered

- To be accompanied at a disciplinary or grievance hearing
- Time off to accompany a worker at a disciplinary or grievance hearing
- Time off for employee representatives
- Time off for European Works Councils
- Time off to accompany an employee at a flexible working hearing
- Information and consultation over proposed redundancies
- Time off for safety representatives.

Visit the Acas website at www.acas.org.uk for further information on all the rights with links to detailed guidance on the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) website. Printed versions of Acas publications are available from **Acas Publications** telephone 08702 42 90 90.

If you do not have easy access to the internet (world wide web) at home or at work try:

- your local library. Most medium-sized or large public libraries provide Internet access including a limited period free of charge. In some areas other sources of free access are available.
- Internet cafes, which provide access to the internet for a fee.
- UK online centres. These were set up by the Department for Education and Skills to help people with no computer skills to access the internet. There are around 6,000 UK online centres. Call the free UK online helpline **0800 77 1234** to find your nearest centre.

This leaflet is one of a series which outlines individual employment rights – other titles include *Discipline, grievances and dismissals, Equality and discrimination, Information and consultation, Parents at work, Pay and Time off*. Information on the law is for guidance only – you may need to seek legal advice on your particular circumstances.

Advisers on **Acas' national helpline 08457 47 47 47 can answer questions on most employment relations matters** including rights and duties, but cannot provide legal advice. Acas also offers a wide range of products and services for organisations of all sizes and the people who work in them. Our aim is to improve organisations and working life through better employment relations.

Rights to representation and trade union membership

To be accompanied at a discipline or grievance hearing

Workers are entitled to be accompanied at most disciplinary and grievance hearings by a fellow worker or a trade union official of their choice, provided they make a reasonable request to be accompanied. They also have the right to a reasonable postponement of the hearing if their chosen companion is unavailable at the time the employer proposes. These rights apply to most workers, including agency workers and home workers.

Time off to accompany a worker at a disciplinary or grievance hearing

Workers have the right to take paid time off during working hours to accompany fellow workers employed by the same employer to most disciplinary and grievance hearings.

Time off for employee representatives

Employees who act as representatives for consultation about redundancies or business transfers, or are candidates to be representatives of this kind, are entitled to reasonable time off with pay during working hours to perform these functions and to receive appropriate training.

Time off for European Works Councils

Employees are allowed reasonable time off with pay to perform their functions as a member of a special negotiating body or a European Works Council, as an information and consultation representative or as a candidate in an election to be such a member or representative.

Time off to accompany an employee at a flexible working hearing

Parents of children under the age of six or disabled children under the age of eighteen have the right to apply to their employer to work more flexibly. The employer has a statutory duty to consider the request seriously and to refuse it only if there are clear business grounds for doing so. If the employer and employee meet to discuss the request at a flexible working hearing then the employee can be accompanied by a colleague – who has the right to paid time off during working hours to attend.

Information on proposed redundancies

To ensure employee representatives can play a useful part in the consultation process over proposed redundancies the employer must disclose certain information *in writing* including:

- reasons for the proposed redundancies
- numbers and descriptions of employees affected
- proposed method of selecting the employees who may be dismissed
- proposed method of carrying out the dismissals, taking account of any agreed procedure, including the period over which the dismissals are to take effect
- how redundancy payments, other than the legal minimum, will be calculated.

Consultation over proposed redundancies

An employer must consult with trade union or employee representatives when it is proposed to dismiss 20 or more employees at one place of work over a period of 90 days or less.

This consultation must take place with a view to reaching agreement with the appropriate representatives and must include discussion about:

- ways of avoiding redundancies
- reducing the numbers to be dismissed
- mitigating the consequences of any redundancies.

Employers also have a duty to act fairly and reasonably in handling redundancies and informing and consulting affected employees individually, regardless of the number of dismissals.

Time off for safety representatives

Safety representatives are entitled, under certain conditions, to time off with pay to carry out their functions and to undergo training.

Time off work for trade union duties and activities

An employee who is an official of an independent trade union which is recognised by the employer must be allowed reasonable time off with pay during working hours to:

- carry out union duties
- consult with the employer, or receive information from the employer, about mass redundancies or business transfers; or
- undergo training for union duties (as approved by the union or by the Trades Union Congress).

An employee who is a member of an independent trade union which is recognised by the employer is also entitled to reasonable time off for certain trade union activities – for example, attending a union conference. The employer is not obliged to pay the employee for time off for these activities.

Trade union membership and non-membership of a trade union

Employees have the right to join or not join a trade union of their choice. Their employer may not dismiss them, select them for redundancy or make them suffer detriment ('detriment' can be any action short of dismissal eg treating someone unfairly in terms of pay or training) for being or proposing to become a union member, nor for taking part in the union's activities at an appropriate time. They are similarly protected if they choose not to belong to a union or refuse to join one.

Dismissals which infringe these rights may be taken to an employment tribunal regardless of the employee's length of service. Employees who claim to have been unfairly dismissed in this way (except those complaining of unfair selection for redundancy) can also apply to the tribunal for an order of interim relief. This requires the employer to continue their contract of employment or to re-employ them pending the final outcome of the case.

Trade union recognition

Independent trade unions (trade unions certified as independent of employers by the Certification Officer) in organisations employing more than 20 workers have the right to claim recognition for 'collective bargaining'. Collective bargaining takes place when a union is recognised to negotiate agreements with employers on pay and other terms and conditions of employment. Recognised trade unions have all the rights to information, consultation and time off mentioned in this leaflet.

For further information on trade union recognition see the Acas Advisory Booklet *Representation at work* (also on the Acas website at www.acas.org.uk) or visit the Central Arbitration Committee website at www.cac.gov.uk.

Consultation over a transfer of business

Employees have the right to be consulted when a business or undertaking, or part of one, is transferred to a new employer – whether employed by the new or previous employers. An employer must tell a trade union or employee representative:

- that the transfer is going to take place, approximately when, and why
- the legal, economic and social implications of the transfer for the affected employees
- whether the employer envisages taking any action (reorganisation for example) in connection with the transfer which will affect the employees, and if so, what action is planned.

If action is planned which will affect the employees, the employer must consult their representatives. The consultation must be undertaken with a view to seeking agreement.

Time off for union learning representatives

Union learning representatives are entitled to reasonable paid time off for training and for carrying out their duties. Union members will be entitled to unpaid time off to consult their learning representative, as long as they belong to a bargaining unit for which the union is recognised. These rights are limited to independent unions in organisations where they are recognised for collective bargaining purposes.

Who has these rights?

Most people are entitled to the statutory rights listed in this leaflet, although, in many cases, **qualifying conditions** must be fulfilled before a right may be claimed. Some rights apply to all employees as soon as they start work; others depend on factors such as length of service, continuity of employment and activities in addition to the job (eg union work). For certain rights, various groups of people are excluded. Most rights apply only to employees but some apply to wider groups of workers. Always check detailed information on qualifying conditions using the links provided on the Acas website at www.acas.org.uk.

Employers and employees are free to agree better terms than those required by legislation in their contract of employment. A contract of employment is an agreement entered into by an employer and employee under which they have certain mutual obligations – for more information visit the Department of Trade and Industry website at www.dti.gov.uk/er.

Employers must give employees a **written statement of the main particulars of employment within two months** of the beginning of the **employment**. It should include, among other things, details of pay, hours, holidays, notice period and an additional note on disciplinary and grievance procedures.

What happens if there is a *dispute about rights at work?*

If employers and employees have a dispute about any of the rights listed in this leaflet they have the following options:

1. **Settle the dispute.** Employees should always try to resolve a problem or dispute with their manager or employer first. This might be through the organisation's own grievance procedure. Both sides can also come to Acas for advice, either from the helpline or an Acas adviser.
2. An employee can make a **complaint to an employment tribunal** if he or she believes an employment right has been denied or infringed. In most cases, people who are treated detrimentally for exercising their rights may also complain to a tribunal. Complaints normally must be made within three months of the date of the alleged infringement – although there are exceptions (follow the links on the Acas website for details). For nearly all types of complaint, once an application is received an Acas conciliator will contact both parties to see if a settlement can be reached before the case reaches a hearing.
3. **Acas Arbitration Scheme.** For cases of alleged unfair dismissal and complaints under the right to request flexible working only, both parties can choose to have their case heard by an independent arbitrator appointed by Acas. The hearing is private, informal, non-legalistic, quick and confidential and the arbitrator's decision final. The remedies are the same as through an employment tribunal.
4. A **tribunal hearing** has various remedies and awards it can make, depending on the type of case. For example, if the tribunal decides an employee has been unfairly dismissed, the remedy could be re-instatement, re-engagement or monetary compensation, depending on the circumstances. Costs can also be awarded. A tribunal hearing is public.

Acas Publications

*Book time with your
Employment specialist*

Whether you need to know how to write a contract of employment, how much holiday you are entitled to or about the latest employment legislation, our range of booklets and leaflets give practical information and advice for both employers and employees on employment matters.

You can choose from our handbooks offering comprehensive guidance to the modern workplace or our Getting it Right pocket guides, providing vital checklists to help small firms run their business.

View and order online at www.acas.org.uk or call Acas Publications on 08702 42 90 90.

Other Acas material on this subject includes:

- Acas Advisory Booklet – *Representation at work*
- Acas Code of Practice – *Time off for trade union duties and activities*
- Acas Getting it Right guides

Acas Training

Our training is carried out by experienced Acas staff who work with businesses every day. They will show you the value to your business of following good practice in employment matters and how to avoid the common pitfalls. We also run special training sessions on new legislation.

Look at the Acas website for up-to-date information about all our training or if you want to book a place online.

Training sessions are specially designed for smaller companies and our current programme includes:

- Managing discipline and grievances at work
- Managing absence at work
- Dealing with bullying and harassment at work
- Employing people: an overview
- The written statement and contracts of employment
- New employment legislation

We also have free online learning to help you – just go to www.acas.org.uk and click on **e-learning** to look at the topics covered.

inform

advise

train

work
with you

Information in this booklet has been revised up to the date of the last reprint - see date below.

Legal information is provided for guidance only and should not be regarded as an authoritative statement of the law, which can only be made by reference to the particular circumstances which apply. It may, therefore, be wise to seek legal advice.

Acas aims to improve organisations and working life through better employment relations. We provide up-to-date information, independent advice, high quality training and we work with employers and employees to solve problems and improve performance.

We are an independent, publicly-funded organisation and many of our services are free.

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