

Personnel Today

Essential HR news and guidance from the
XpertHR team

Back to school: Top 10 tips for employers at the start of the new term

By Kate Redshaw on 8 Sep 2014 in [Flexible working](#), [Holidays and holiday pay](#), [Severe weather](#), [Shared parental leave](#), [Social media](#), [Terms and conditions of employment](#), [Zero hours](#)



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With the sand finally gone from between your toes and the flip flops banished to the back of the wardrobe, it is time to turn your thoughts to your to-do list at the start of the “new term”. In case the sunshine has temporarily dimmed your focus, Kate Redshaw from Burges Salmon runs through some of the key actions for employers over the coming months.

1. Shared parental leave

The shared parental leave regulations will apply to employees expecting babies on or after 5 April 2015. This means that recently pregnant employees and their partners will be entitled to benefit from the new right (subject to satisfying the eligibility requirements) and will want to know where they stand sooner rather than later.

As with other types of parental leave, it is sensible to put in place a specific shared parental leave policy, so it is time to get drafting if you have not done so already. A policy point to consider is whether or not you will be enhancing shared parental pay – if you already enhance maternity pay, careful thought should be given as to whether or not you plan to do the same for shared parental leave.

2. Flexible working policy

The long hot summer may have set your employees' minds racing on ways to embrace a better work/life balance. The existing right to request flexible working was extended on 30 June 2014 to all employees with 26 weeks' service or more – not just those with caring responsibilities. If you have not updated your flexible working policy, now is the time to do so (the statutory procedural requirements have also been relaxed so you may want to tweak your process accordingly).

Don't forget to let line managers know about this new change so they don't laugh when an employee requests a four-day week so he has more time to practise his golf.

3. Social media policy

What do a tanned lothario in trunks, the Empire State Building and a kangaroo have in common? Not a huge amount, to be fair, but they are all potential subjects of the ever-popular holiday snap. As such, they must be shared, as a matter of urgency, with as many people as possible via digital media. All well and good but, unless you are a teenager (and few employees are), it is not a massively effective use of time. Remind employees, in the nicest possible way, of the do's and don'ts of your social media policy and to keep online posting to out of work hours.

4. Holiday pay and overtime

The summer may be all but over but have you been underpaying holiday pay? Currently awaiting judgment is the important case of *Bear Scotland Ltd v Fulton and Baxter*, where the employees involved are hoping that the Employment Appeal Tribunal will agree with

the employment tribunal that voluntary overtime should be included when calculating their holiday pay. Financial implications are potentially huge for many businesses and it is an area you need to get to grips with if you are not already familiar with the issue.

5. Holiday pay and commission

In a similar vein to the overtime/underpaid holiday pay argument, if your sales staff are rewarded by commission, be prepared for changes that mean commission has to be taken into account when calculating holiday pay.

6. Contracts of employment for new starters

If your September is all about legions of suited and booted graduate trainees, you are not alone. But do not just blow the dust off last year's contract of employment for your new starters – it is always worth having a quick review and refresh – do the probationary periods work, have you set targets and objectives, and is there a performance review scheduled in those early months? All of these points will help you monitor substance over style and help your new joiners understand what they are aiming to achieve.

7. Adverse weather policy

With the hot weather we have enjoyed, it is easy to forget that last spring saw horrific flooding across the UK. As yet another person rang in to say they would not make it in, you said to yourself you would have an adverse weather policy in place for next year, dealing with all those difficult questions: should the time off be paid or unpaid, how come their next-door neighbour made it in, do they have the equipment to work from home? But then the weather got better and somehow it slipped down the list of priorities. Winter is looming large so now is the time to sharpen that pencil and get drafting – you will thank yourself come January.

8. The office party

With Christmas fast approaching, so does the subject of the office party. Make sure managers are familiar with your equality and diversity policy so they can remind their teams of the company's expectations – and avoid a repeat of last year's debacle.

9. Zero hours contracts

With the economy on the up, you may find yourself in need of additional staff. If you are a habitual zero hours contract user, consider whether, and how, these work for you.

While regulations have yet to be brought in, it is very much at the top of the Government's agenda to improve conditions for those on this type of contract so be prepared.

10. Back to school

Last but not least, why not treat yourself to a new satchel, complete with matching pencil case – you are going to need them!



About Kate Redshaw

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