

## How family-friendly are your policies?

### The Work and Families Act 2006

As part of the Work and Families Act 2006, a new raft of family-friendly policies is set to be introduced on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2007.

There may be a number of rights that you are already familiar with such as the right of employees to request flexible working in certain circumstances. However, in little more than 4 months' time, carers of adults (and there are 3 million of them in work) will acquire the same rights as parents of children to request flexible working.

For many employers, accommodating these changes will not cause any particular logistical difficulties, but for some, there may need to be a review of existing policies and training to senior staff on what the rights are and how you can make sure you are not caught out.

### The Changes

In addition to the increased availability of flexible working practices, several other changes will come into force on the same date, among these:

- ❖ The introduction of **keeping in touch days** whereby women on maternity leave can opt to come into work for up to 10 days, without losing any maternity pay
- ❖ Employers will be able to **make reasonable contact** with employees on maternity or adoption leave
- ❖ Women who are pregnant on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2007 will be able to claim **39 weeks' maternity pay** rather than the current entitlement of 26 weeks. Furthermore, the Government is looking to extend this to twelve months' pay by the end of the current Parliament
- ❖ **Removal of the length of service** requirement for additional maternity leave bringing the total entitlement to 52 weeks
- ❖ **Doubling the notice period** from 4 to 8 weeks for women wishing to return to work early from maternity leave
- ❖ **Additional paternity leave** for employed fathers or partners of mothers or adopters up to a maximum of 26 weeks from the date of birth or adoption. This right will also extend to men or women in same-sex relationships

Finally, an important change that many employers currently ignore will be the extension of the statutory paid holiday entitlement from 20 to 28 days to take into account the 8 annual bank holidays.

The increase in statutory paid holiday entitlement will be phased in over time giving employers time to adapt to the change. The change will come in in two phases, adding four days on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2007 and the other four on or before 1<sup>st</sup> October 2009.

### **Are you compliant?**

If your organisation does not comply with any part of the new legislation, employees who feel they have been mistreated or have not received their entitlement may decide to pursue a claim for compensation. This could turn into lengthy and costly tribunals that not only take up vital resources in terms of time and money but can also damage your organisation's reputation.

If you are unsure as to how to implement any of these changes or just want an independent 'audit' of your policies to make sure they comply, please get in touch with our Employment Team.

Glyn Jones is our Head of Employment and will be happy to provide advice and training on all aspects of the changes and how your organisation can stay ahead of the game.