

# Breedon Bulletin

## The Changing Landscape of Workplace HR



Welcome to the March edition of the Breedon Bulletin. As we move into spring, businesses continue to face evolving HR challenges, from navigating new legal duties around workplace harassment to managing the rising cases of long-term sickness absence.

This month, we explore two key issues impacting employers: the increase in sexual harassment complaints following the introduction of the duty to prevent harassment and the growing burden of long-term sickness absences. We also cover broader HR trends, including flexible working requests, developments in AI-driven recruitment and the benefits of employee engagement...look out for our special employee engagement offer as part of our 25 year anniversary celebrations!

As always, if you need support managing any HR issues, our team is here to help.

## Key HR Trends for Spring 2025: What Employers Need to Know

Stay ahead with these emerging HR developments:

- **Flexible Working Requests:** Legislation already gives employees the right to request flexible working from day one of employment. With flexible working set to become the default position, employers need to get on top of their options to make sure they are able to handle requests fairly and within the statutory timeframe.
- **AI in Recruitment:** With increased use of AI-driven recruitment tools, businesses must ensure hiring practices remain non-discriminatory.
- **The Four-Day Workweek Debate:** Trials continue across the UK, with mixed results. Should your business consider a shorter working week? While some businesses report increased efficiency and job satisfaction, others struggle with operational feasibility. The four day week foundation report that 200 UK companies have now committed to a permanent four day working week, but employers considering a four-day workweek should conduct a thorough trial, seek employee feedback, and assess its impact on overall business performance.

# Anti-Harassment: what's happening on the ground

Over recent months, we've been actively highlighting the introduction of the new legal duty requiring employers to take proactive steps to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. This shift moves beyond simply responding to incidents and places an expectation on employers to demonstrate they have taken reasonable steps to prevent harassment from occurring and is soon set to be further expanded to an obligation to take **ALL** reasonable steps.

Interestingly, we have started to see a marked increase in the number of sexual harassment-related complaints being raised within workplaces. It's difficult to determine whether this rise is directly linked to employees becoming more aware of the legislative changes or whether this is purely coincidental, but the increase is significant when compared to historical data.

Regardless of the cause, this shift underscores the importance of having robust preventative measures in place. Employers who fail to comply risk not only legal repercussions but also significant reputational damage and potential disruption within their teams.

To support businesses in meeting this new duty, we have developed a comprehensive Anti-Harassment Compliance Pack, which contains everything employers need to ensure compliance:

- A fully up-to-date harassment and bullying policy.
- Training materials for employees and managers.
- A step-by-step manager's guide to handling harassment complaints.
- A risk assessment tool to identify potential risks and gaps in compliance.

**Get in touch to purchase your copy**



## Employment Tribunal Highlights: Recent Cases

Recent cases highlight the risks employers face when failing to comply with employment law:

A Christian School Assistant who was dismissed after making Facebook comments that her employer considered to be transphobic and homophobic has won her case at the Court of Appeal, following a six year legal battle. Dismissal was found to be a disproportionate response in a case which undoubtedly cost more in legal fees than the £56,000 that the claimant was asking for.

An NHS worker who suffered from fibromyalgia has been awarded more than £70,000 in compensation after her employer failed to provide timely reasonable adjustments in her workplace. A sit-stand desk which was delivered in November was not set up until the following March, leading to a successful disability discrimination claim.

A teacher who was dismissed after taking extended sick leave due to long covid has been awarded over £42,000 in compensation following a successful disability discrimination claim. Long covid is now recognised as a disability under UK law.

These cases highlight the importance of following fair procedures and maintaining compliance with employment laws.



# The Power of Employee Engagement: Driving Business Success

## Celebrating 25 Years of Breedon Consulting with a Special Offer!

Employee engagement has never been more critical to business success. Highly engaged employees are more productive, more committed, and more likely to stay with their employer. As we celebrate 25 years of helping businesses build better workplaces, we're offering a free mini engagement audit to the first 25 companies who email us – a great opportunity to assess your current engagement levels and get actionable insights.

### The Business Benefits of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement isn't just about making work enjoyable; it has tangible business benefits that directly impact the bottom line. Here's why businesses should prioritise engagement:

- **Increased Productivity:** Engaged employees are 21% more productive than their disengaged counterparts. They take ownership of their tasks, innovate more, and work efficiently.
- **Higher Retention Rates:** Employees who feel valued and involved are far less likely to seek opportunities elsewhere. A disengaged workforce leads to high turnover costs and business disruption.
- **Better Customer Satisfaction:** Engaged employees provide better customer service, leading to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty.
- **Reduced Absenteeism:** Studies show that businesses with high engagement see 41% lower absenteeism, reducing the costs associated with sick leave and lost productivity.
- **Stronger Workplace Culture:** A positive, engaging work environment fosters collaboration, creativity, and alignment with company goals.

### How to Boost Employee Engagement

If you want to increase engagement in your workforce, here are some key strategies to consider:

- Recognise and Reward Contributions
- Encourage Open Communication
- Offer Career Development Opportunities
- Support Work-Life Balance
- Measure Engagement Regularly

### Claim Your Free Employee Engagement Mini Audit!

To celebrate our 25 years in business, we're offering a free mini engagement audit to the first 25 companies who email us. This audit will help identify strengths and areas for improvement in your engagement strategy, with practical recommendations to drive meaningful change.

Email us today at [info@breedonconsulting.co.uk](mailto:info@breedonconsulting.co.uk) to claim your free mini audit and take the first step toward building a more engaged, high-performing workforce!

# Focus on

# Managing the Rise in Long-Term Sickness Absences



## The Growing Issue

Long-term sickness absence is on the rise, driven by mental health conditions, long COVID, and chronic illnesses. This presents challenges for SMEs, including operational disruption and legal risks.

Long term sickness absence is often defined as absence lasting for four weeks or more. There are two stages to managing an employee's long-term sickness absence. The first is to manage the employee's absence from work and the second to manage their return to work.

### Legal Considerations

Employers must handle long-term absences carefully to avoid disability discrimination claims. If an employee is unable to return to work, businesses should follow a fair and lawful process.

### Managing Long-Term Sickness Effectively

- Maintain regular communication with absent employees.
- Consider reasonable adjustments to support a return to work.
- Use occupational health assessments to guide decisions.
- Follow a structured capability process where necessary.

## Avoiding Disability Discrimination

An employee who is off sick for a lengthy period of time may be disabled for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010. If this is the case the employee will be entitled to protection against discriminatory treatment and to expect you to make reasonable adjustments.

The Act contains a very broad definition of disability, which includes both physical and mental impairments that last, or are expected to last, 12 months or more and are substantial in terms of their effects on the person's day-to-day life.

A wide range of physical and mental conditions and illnesses may amount to disabilities, depending always on whether or not the effect of the condition on the person is substantial and long term.

An important point to note is that a condition may amount to a disability even if, as a result of medication or another form of support, the person experiences no adverse effects on a day-to-day basis. The question that determines whether or not an employee is disabled is how the condition would affect the employee if he or she did not take the medication or use the support.

We provide tailored guidance on managing long-term absences, ensuring compliance while balancing business needs. Contact us for support.





# Questions & Answers

## What should I do if an EEA national employee does not have settled or pre-settled status?

If you become aware that an EEA (other than Irish) or Swiss employee has not applied under the settlement scheme and cannot provide evidence of another status giving them the right to work in the UK, you will need to take steps to end their employment.

## Will the new offence of failure to prevent fraud apply to my organisation?

From 1st September 2025, a new offence of failure to prevent fraud will be introduced. The offence applies to organisations that meet at least two of the following criteria:

- more than 250 employees;
- more than £36 million turnover;
- more than £18 million in total assets

## Is an employee entitled to be paid if their absence is unauthorised?

There is no obligation on employers to pay employees their normal pay for periods of unauthorised absence. An employer that fails to pay an employee in these circumstances would not normally be in breach of the employee's contract of employment.

Let us know if you have questions you'd like to have answered in our next Breedon Bulletin

## Let's talk on the phone

### Here are three questions for you:

- Do you currently have HR support?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how happy are you with them?
- If the answer isn't "I'm so delighted I could print 1,000 flyers to spread the word about them", let's jump on a video call

You know just how important it is to get proactive, responsive HR support. That's what we do. And we're taking on new clients.



**Set up a 15 minute exploratory call at**  
**[www.breedonconsulting.co.uk](http://www.breedonconsulting.co.uk)**



**YOUR HR EXPERT**

