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your legal rights at work in Northern Ireland 2019-20

members' factcard

experts at work



YOUR RIGHTS AT WORK

This factcard outlines your rights at work in Northern Ireland as of 1 January 2019. It covers the minimum legal requirements – in most cases your contract of employment will offer better terms, so the rights in your contract will apply.

Your rights cannot be weaker than the legal minima. Always check the contractual terms that apply to you – these may be recorded in:

- your written contract
- a statement of terms and conditions
- a staff handbook/intranet
- your letter of appointment, or
- company rules.

This factcard cannot cover all circumstances, so always seek advice from your local Prospect representative.

The law in Great Britain is different in several respects, so if you are working in Great Britain, check Prospect's other factcard.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

All the rights in this factcard apply to 'employees' – people who work under a contract of service. Some also apply to a broader group of 'workers', such as zero hours contract workers, consultants or freelancers. Workers have legal rights in respect of:

- discrimination on grounds of race, sex, disability, sexual orientation, age, religious belief or political opinion
- working time
- right to be accompanied by a trade union representative at disciplinary or grievance hearings
- part-time working
- national minimum wage.

Only the genuinely self-employed, working for a customer or client, are excluded from workers' rights. Seek advice if you are unsure whether you are an employee.

See Prospect's *Members' Guide to Atypical Workers* for more on employment status.

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF TERMS

All employees are entitled to receive a written statement of their terms and conditions of employment within two months of starting work. This must include the following details or state where they can be found:

- names of employer and employee
- date employment began
- date of continuous employment
- scale or rate of pay or how it is calculated
- intervals of pay (monthly, weekly etc)
- hours of work
- holiday entitlement, holiday pay
- sickness arrangements, sick pay
- pension entitlement
- length of notice of termination required by employer and employee
- job title or brief description of the work
- place of work and any mobility obligations
- collective agreements which affect terms and conditions of employment
- disciplinary and grievance procedures
- termination date if the contract is for a fixed term
- details if the employee is to work outside the UK.

PAY

All employees are entitled to:

- itemised pay statements
- statutory sick pay (with some exceptions)
- the national minimum wage (from April 2019: £8.21 an hour for over-25s, £7.70 for 21-24 year olds, £6.15 for 18-20 year olds and £4.35 for under 18 year olds and an apprentice rate of £3.90.
- not to have unauthorised deductions from pay.

PENSIONS

All employers must provide minimum pension provision under the auto enrolment provisions.

WORKING TIME

With some exceptions, most workers have the right to:

- a daily rest period of 11 hours
- a weekly rest period of 24 hours
- a 20-minute break if working more than 6 hours a day
- work no more than an average 48 hours a week
- work no more than an average 8 hours a night
- 5.6 weeks' paid annual leave a year (including public holidays).

EQUAL PAY

Women and men employed on work rated as equivalent, like work or work of equal value, are entitled to equal pay unless the employer has a material reason for the difference in pay.

DISCRIMINATION

All workers have the right not to be discriminated against on the grounds of the following characteristics:

- gender
- disability
- age
- marriage & civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- sexual orientation
- gender reassignment
- religious belief or political opinion

as regards recruitment, terms and conditions, benefits, promotion, training or transfer.

All workers have the right not to be harassed or dismissed on the grounds of the protected characteristics.

Legislation also protects workers from being victimised for alleging a breach of discrimination laws, taking proceedings or supporting someone else who has done so.

People with a disability are entitled to have reasonable adjustments made to the job or working environment to enable them to remain in or to take up employment.

FAMILY RIGHTS

All women are entitled to:

- 52 weeks' maternity leave
- statutory maternity pay
- paid time off work to attend ante-natal sessions.

Adoptive parents have similar entitlements.

Men and women are entitled to:

- shared parental leave and pay (the mother's partner can share the statutory leave and pay)
- time off to care for dependants in exceptional circumstances
- return to the same or (in some cases) similar job after maternity or parental leave
- 18 weeks' unpaid parental leave for children aged up to 18 but only after one year's continuous employment
- 2 weeks' paternity/partner leave and statutory paternity pay.

PART-TIME WORKERS

Part-time workers have the right to equal treatment with comparable full-time workers unless the difference can be 'objectively justified'.

Equal rights apply to terms and conditions on a pro rata basis where appropriate, eg pay, training, sick pay, pensions, leave and promotion. In some cases, workers can use discrimination laws to change to part-time work to care for dependants or because of a disability.

FIXED-TERM CONTRACTS

Employees on a fixed-term contract are entitled to equal treatment with a comparable permanent employee, unless the employer can objectively justify the difference in treatment. Where an employee has been continuously employed on a fixed-term contract for four years or more, any subsequent renewal of the contract will be deemed to be for an indefinite term, unless the employer can objectively justify a further fixed term.

FLEXIBLE WORKING

All employees who have 26 weeks' continuous employment have the right to request flexible working to change their hours, working pattern or to work from home.

YOUNG WORKERS

Most employment rights apply to all workers, but there are differences for workers under 18:

- working time (a daily rest period of 12 hours, a weekly rest of 48 hours and a 30-minute break if working more than 4.5 hours)
- national minimum wage rates (see above)
- time off for training (employees who have not achieved set standards in education are entitled to reasonable paid time off for relevant training).

HEALTH AND SAFETY

All employers are covered by the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order which sets minimum standards of health and safety at work. Employees have the right:

- not to be dismissed or suffer any other detriment for being a safety rep or for raising health and safety concerns or taking certain actions
- to be paid if suspended from work on medical grounds under regulations covering: control of lead, ionising radiation, control of substances hazardous to health – only after one month's continuous employment.

TRADE UNION RIGHTS

All employees have the right not to suffer a detriment or to be dismissed on the grounds of their trade union membership or activities. Where the union is recognised, members and reps are entitled to reasonable time off for trade union duties and activities. Employees also have the right not to be dismissed for taking official industrial

action within 12 weeks of the start of the action.

Trade unions have the right to be:

- recognised by an employer where the majority of workers in a bargaining unit are members, or where there has been a successful ballot
- consulted over redundancies and transfers of undertakings.

There is a legal duty on employers with more than 50 employees to inform and consult the workforce on a range of issues.

RIGHT TO BE ACCOMPANIED

All employers must allow workers to be accompanied by a trade union rep at a disciplinary hearing or certain grievance hearings. This applies whether or not the employer recognises a union.

TIME OFF FOR PUBLIC DUTIES

Employees who carry out public duties are entitled to reasonable time off work for undertaking those duties, eg lay magistrate, members of certain public bodies including a local authority, statutory tribunal, health authority or education body, such as a board of school governors.

DETRIMENT

All employees have the right not to be subjected to any detriment or less favourable treatment for asserting rights in respect of:

- working time
 - parental leave
 - maternity, paternity or adoption
 - part-time working
 - national minimum wage
 - public interest disclosure (whistleblowing)
 - activity connected to a claim for union recognition
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- requesting flexible working
- being a pension fund trustee or employee rep.

TRANSFERS OF UNDERTAKINGS

The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE) offer protection if there is a transfer of undertakings, eg contracting out, privatisation, company sale or takeover. The main rights are:

- your employment transfers if there is a transfer of undertakings
- not to be dismissed for a reason connected to a transfer – only after one year's employment
- not to have your terms and conditions of employment worsened because of the transfer (unless the employer can show an economic, technical or organisational reason entailing change in the workforce).

NOTICE OF TERMINATION

Employers must give notice to employees as follows:

- after one month of employment – one week
- after two years' of employment – two weeks
- one week's notice for each additional year of employment, up to a maximum of 12 weeks.

Contracts of employment may provide for longer periods. Employees must give employers one week's notice.

UNFAIR DISMISSAL

After one year's service, employees have the right not to be unfairly dismissed. If dismissed, they have the right to a written statement of the reasons for dismissal. Disciplinary and appeal procedures should be followed. Failure to do so can result in compensation being reduced. If the employer does not apply a fair procedure in accordance with the Labour Relations Agency's Code of Practice the dismissal will be unfair.

SPECIAL CASES OF UNFAIR DISMISSAL

Dismissal on any of the grounds listed below – regardless of length of service – is automatically unfair. Employees can bring a claim to an industrial tribunal if they are dismissed because of:

- pregnancy or childbirth
- health and safety reasons (in certain circumstances)
- asserting a statutory right like working time, maternity or parental leave, minimum wage
- trade union membership or activities
- taking lawful industrial action (in certain circumstances)
- making a protected disclosure in the public interest (whistleblowing)
- being an employee rep or pension fund trustee
- campaigning for union recognition
- failure to follow the statutory dismissal procedure.

COMPENSATION

Maximum compensation for most cases of unfair dismissal is £15,900 for the basic award and £83,847 for the compensatory award (from 6 April 2018). Average awards are much less, just £12,000 in 2014/15. There is no maximum where the dismissal was on the grounds of discrimination, health and safety or for making a protected disclosure. Additional compensation may be awarded where an employer refuses reinstatement ordered by the tribunal.

There is a special procedure (‘interim relief’) for immediate reinstatement or continuation of contract where a dismissal is for any of the following:

- trade union membership or activities
 - for being a health and safety rep, pension fund trustee, or an employee rep for the purposes of working time, redundancy or transfer consultations, or
 - for making a protected disclosure (whistleblowing).
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REDUNDANCY

Employees are entitled to a statutory redundancy payment if they are made redundant after two years or more continuous employment. They are also entitled to a reasonable period of paid time off to look for work or to arrange training once notice of redundancy is given.

The maximum statutory redundancy payment is currently £15,900 (6/4/18) depending on age and length of service.

Redundancy may also be an unfair dismissal if the employee was unfairly selected, not consulted in advance, or the employer failed to consider alternative employment for the employee.

BREACH OF CONTRACT

All employees are entitled to:

- bring a claim for breach of contract, which arises or is outstanding at termination of employment, up to a limit of £25,000 in the industrial tribunal
- bring a breach of contract claim to the county court. But seek advice on whether it is best to take the case through a tribunal or a court.

INSOLVENCY OF EMPLOYER

If their employer becomes insolvent, employees can claim from the National Insurance Fund if they are owed:

- statutory redundancy pay
- arrears of pay of up to eight weeks
- pay for the statutory notice period
- up to six weeks' holiday pay
- a basic award for unfair dismissal.

A week's pay is limited to £530 (from 6/4/18).

INDUSTRIAL TRIBUNALS

There are strict time limits for making a claim to a tribunal. For most of the statutory rights in this factcard, application must be made within three months of the incident or

dismissal occurring (see table). The employee should always follow the grievance or disciplinary procedure. If they do not, compensation may be reduced by up to 50 per cent.

The Fair Employment Tribunal hears cases of discrimination on the grounds of religious belief or political opinion.

The law is likely to change in the future so that claimants must make an application for preclaim conciliation with the Labour Relations Agency before presenting a claim to the tribunal. Check with Prospect for details.

ADVICE FROM PROSPECT

Prospect can advise members on a range of issues concerning their rights at work. The union may also represent members at internal grievance or disciplinary hearings and industrial tribunals. Workplace and other legal assistance is offered at the discretion of the union, and is decided on the facts and merits of each case. See Prospect's guide to legal advice for details of the legal assistance scheme and the terms and conditions for assistance. This factcard can only offer a brief summary of employment rights. Check Prospect's website for more information and various members' guides on specific rights.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Labour Relations Agency – www.lra.org.uk
 - NI Direct Government – www.nidirect.gov.uk
 - Equality Commission NI – www.equalityni.org
 - Industrial Tribunals and Fair Employment Tribunal – www.employmenttribunalsni.co.uk
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STATUTORY RIGHTS

TIME LIMIT

CONTRACTS AND PAY	SERVICE	MONTHS*
Unlawful deduction of wages	none	3
Statement of particulars of employment	2 months	3
National minimum wage	none	3
Request for flexible working	26 weeks	3
WORKING TIME		
No detriment for refusing to work more than 48 hours a week on average	none	3
Uninterrupted rest period of 11 hours per day, 24 hours per week	none	3
5.6 weeks paid annual leave	none	3
EQUAL RIGHTS		
Discrimination on grounds of race, sex, disability, sexual orientation or age	none	3
Equal treatment on grounds of religious belief or political opinion	none	3
Equal pay between women and men	none	6
Equal treatment for part-time work	none	3
No detriment for trade union membership or activities	none	3
Equal rights for FTC workers	none	3
FAMILY RIGHTS		
Parental leave	1 year	3
Time off for dependents	none	3
52 weeks' maternity leave	none	3
Shared parental leave	26 weeks	3
Paternity leave	26 weeks	3
Adoption leave	26 weeks	3
TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT		
Notice of termination	1 month	3
Unfair dismissal	1 year	3
Unfair dismissal on grounds of:	none	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● trade union activities or membership ● asserting a statutory right ● making a protected disclosure ● being an employee representative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● pregnancy/childbirth ● health and safety activities ● being a pension trustee 	
Interim relief applications	none	7 days
Statutory redundancy payment	2 years	6
Written reasons for dismissal	2 years	3
Breach of contract arising or outstanding on termination of employment	none	3

* For taking a claim to an industrial tribunal