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Article: More time for mums with their babies

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FROM NOW ON ANYONE HAVING A BABY, AND EMPLOYED, CAN BENEFIT FROM NEW EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS FOR WORKING MOTHERS, REFLECTING THE GOVERNMENT'S DRIVE TOWARDS FAMILY FRIENDLY LEGISLATION.

THE WORK AND FAMILIES ACT 2006, EFFECTIVE FROM THE BEGINNING OF APRIL THIS YEAR, IS LIKE THE PROVERBIAL COURTESY EGG - GOOD IN PARTS - AND WHETHER YOU ARE THE MUM OR THE EMPLOYER YOU NEED TO KNOW WHAT'S CHANGING.

ONE OF THE MAIN PROVISIONS OF THE ACT EXTENDS STATUTORY MATERNITY PAY, ADOPTION PAY AND MATERNITY ALLOWANCE FROM 6 TO 9 MONTHS, FROM 1st APRIL THIS YEAR, WITH THE INTENTION OF EXTENDING THAT TO A FULL YEAR BY THE END OF THE CURRENT PARLIAMENT. THIS SHOULD BENEFIT AN ESTIMATED 400,000 WORKING MOTHERS AND THEIR FAMILIES EACH YEAR. IN RETURN, PREGNANT EMPLOYEES MUST GIVE THEIR EMPLOYER 8 WEEKS NOTICE INSTEAD OF 28 DAYS, TO ENABLE EMPLOYERS TO PLAN AHEAD MORE EASILY, IF THEY WISH TO RETURN EARLY FROM MATERNITY LEAVE.

NEW 'KEEPING IN TOUCH' DAYS WILL HELP SMALL MUMS RETURN TO WORK WHEN HER MATERNITY LEAVE ENDS. UP TO 10 OF THESE DAYS WILL HELP MOTHERS AND EMPLOYERS HAVE BETTER COMMUNICATION DURING MATERNITY LEAVE, ALLOWING MOTHERS TO RETURN TO WORK OCCASIONALLY AND KEEP UP TO DATE WITH DEVELOPMENTS. BUT THESE DAYS ARE NOT OBLIGATORY ON EITHER SIDE AND NEED ONLY TAKE PLACE WHERE THE EMPLOYER AND MOTHER BOTH AGREE THAT THEY WOULD BE USEFUL.

WHAT ABOUT FATHERS? AT THE MOMENT FATHERS ARE ENTITLED TO 2 WEEKS PATERNITY LEAVE BUT THERE ARE PLANS TO EXTEND THAT PERIOD AT THE SAME TIME AS THE EXTENSION OF STATUTORY MATERNITY PAY, ADOPTION PAY AND MATERNITY ALLOWANCE, ALTHOUGH THIS IS UNLIKELY TO BE BEFORE 2008.

THESE NEW MEASURES DO PLACE EXTRA RESPONSIBILITIES ON EMPLOYERS BUT BEING FULLY IN THE PICTURE AND PLANNING AHEAD CAN PREVENT THE MANY MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND DIFFICULTIES THAT CAN ARISE IN EMPLOYMENT LAW ISSUES.

FOR MORE ADVICE, WHETHER YOU ARE AN EMPLOYER OR EMPLOYEE, YOU CAN CALL GILL BROWN, PARTNER SPECIALISING IN EMPLOYMENT LAW AT PHILLIPS SOLICITORS, ON 01256 854605.

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