



Maternity Leave Employees Returning to Work

The Office of National Statistics says approximately 56% of women with children under the age of five are in employment. This does mean there are a growing number of women returning to work following maternity leave.

So how can a smooth transition back to work be ensured?

An awareness of a woman's rights on her return to work is important. These rights vary depending on whether she returns during or after Ordinary Maternity Leave (OML), or Additional Maternity Leave (AML). For example, OML lasts for six months and anyone returning during or straight after this period is entitled to return to the job role that she was previously employed in.

If she returns after AML, she may be placed in an alternative role if her original job is unavailable. However, it must be suitable for her level of skills etc. and not a demotion. **Note.** Whilst women are entitled to nine months paid maternity leave (as from April 1 2007), this has not altered the periods of OML and AML.

Easing the Return

The equal opportunities Commission has calculated that pregnancy-related dismissal costs employers £126 million a year due to lost staff, replacement and training. So minimise the likelihood of dismissal arising from a breakdown in working relationships by planning for both the maternity leave and the employee's return.

Get organised: Before the employee goes on maternity leave, establish how contact will be maintained and see that any appraisal due is held and any bonus owing is paid.

Keep in touch: Don't forget to keep the employee informed of work updates and job opportunities even if you don't think she has the right qualifications or experience for them.

The return: If she has taken AML and can't return to her old job, explain why this is the case, e.g. due to business restructuring. Always have hard evidence to back this up.

Tip: On the employee's first day back, meet and set out what her priorities for the coming weeks will be. Also make sure that support is there, as it's often the success of this transition period back to work that makes the difference between a happy employee and a tribunal claim.

Keeping in touch days: Reduce problems further by using 'keeping in touch days'. These were introduced on April 1 2007 and allow those on maternity leave to attend work for up to ten days for training or to keep themselves up-to-date with developments.

Tip: Maximise the effectiveness of these days by having an outline of what you want to achieve and stick to it