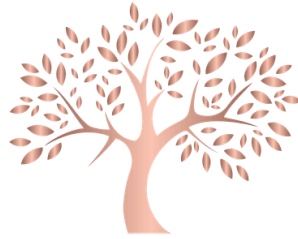


October 2026



Autumn HR

THE HR BRIEF

Your monthly update on the employment changes that matter to your business.

What is around the corner for you

The Autumn HR Brief is here to give you a simple, practical heads-up on the changes you need to know about, what's around the corner and anything you should be thinking about now.

This month, we're focusing on three important areas:

1. The changes to employers' duties around sexual harassment, including harassment by third parties
2. The latest changes affecting trade union access rights
3. The new tribunal time limit

We'll explain what's changing and what it means for your business.



Autumn HR

Aligning our HR expertise to deliver true value and commercial support to your business

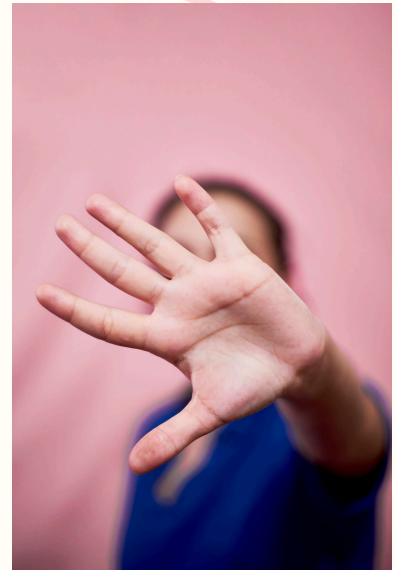
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Third party sexual harassment

From 30 October 2026, employers will have a new legal **duty not to permit their employees to be harassed by third parties such as customers, clients, contractors, suppliers or members of the public.**

For an employer to be liable, the employee must have been harassed in the course of their employment and the employer must have failed to take all reasonable steps to prevent the harassment.

From the same date, 30 October 2026, the existing duty to take "reasonable steps" to prevent sexual harassment will become a duty to take "all reasonable steps". This means employers need to be proactive about preventing sexual harassment, rather than simply responding when something happens.



What do you need to do now?

1. **Identify the risks** - think about who employees come into contact with and where the risks of harassment might arise, including online, at events, on client premises and when dealing with customers.
2. **Review policies** - make sure bullying and sexual harassment policies cover inappropriate behaviour from third parties, not just colleagues.
3. **Make reporting easy** - employees should know who they can speak to if a customer, client or other third party behaves inappropriately.
4. **Record incidents and the action taken in response**
5. **Consider practical measures** - for example staff training, warning customers about unacceptable behaviour, appropriate contractual terms, security measures or procedures for dealing with difficult customers.

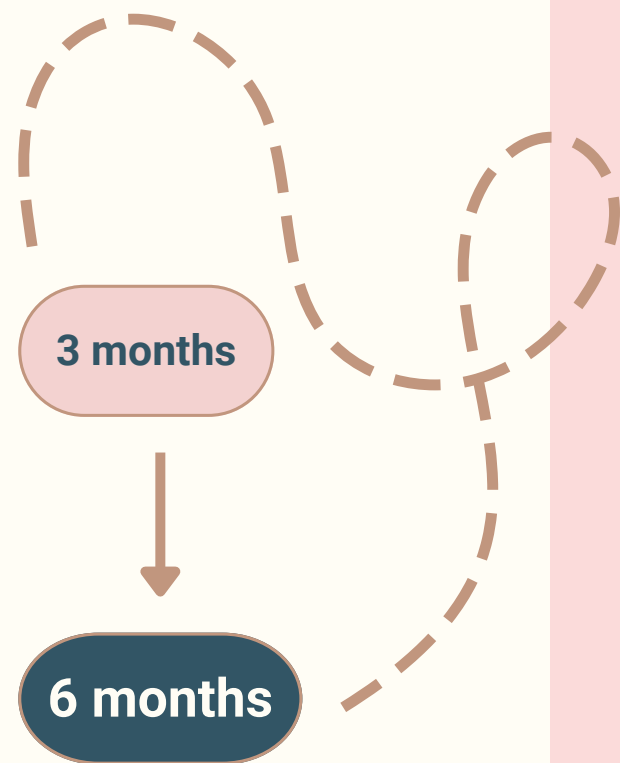
Employment Tribunal time limits are doubling

From 1 October 2026, employees will have six months, rather than three months, to bring the majority of claims to an Employment Tribunal.

The three-month window that existed before worked in the employers' favour. Three months passes quickly and often employees simply ran out of time to lodge a complaint.

With the new change, employees have more time to reflect, take advice and build a stronger case.

The new limit applies to any dismissal or workplace incident on or after 1 October 2026. Anything before that date still falls under the old three-month rule.



What does this change mean for you?

The change means employers will have a longer period in which an employee could potentially bring a claim to an Employment Tribunal. It is therefore more important than ever to:

- deal with employee concerns promptly rather than allowing issues to drift;
- keep clear records of grievances, disciplinary matters and other workplace issues;
- follow appropriate policies and procedures;
- take complaints seriously and investigate them properly; and
- seek advice early where there is a risk of an employment dispute escalating.

New trade union access rights

If you have never had to deal with a Trade Union, October might change that.

Workplace access rules are expected to come into force on 30 October 2026, subject to parliamentary approval. They would allow trade unions to request physical or digital access to workplaces to meet, recruit and organise workers.

A union does not need to have existing members in your workplace to make a request. If you have 21 or more workers across your business and you cannot agree access terms, the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC) could impose them.

Under the proposed process, you would have 15 working days to respond to a formal request, followed by 25 working days to negotiate. Repeated breaches of a statutory access agreement could lead to penalties of up to £500,000.

There's a separate change to prepare for, too. From 1 January 2027, employers will be required to give workers a written statement about their right to join a trade union.

What should you do now?

1. Plan how you'll add the written statement to your onboarding process.
2. Think about who would handle an access request if one arrived next month and how they would keep a track of deadlines.
3. And make sure that your managers know where to direct any approach from a union.

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