

Employee Handbook Updates – April 2026

The **Employment Rights Act 2026** has begun to come into effect with a series of changes, the handbook and template documents have been updated to reflect these changes. These are:

Informing employees of their right to join a Trade Union

With effect from October 2026 employers must inform employees that they have the right to join a union should they wish to. We have updated the Statement of Particulars and the Handbook.

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Trade Unions

There is no formal arrangement or collective bargaining in place with any union. You are welcome to join a union of your choosing should you wish to do so.

Holiday

With effect from 6th April 2026 employers must keep a record of how much holiday workers have taken and when it was taken, this must be retained for 6 years.

Sickness Absence

With effect from 6th April 2026 statutory sick pay will be paid from the first day of absence with no minimum earning threshold.

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Sick Pay

You are entitled to statutory sick pay (SSP) if you are absent because of sickness or injury provided you meet any statutory qualifying conditions. The rate of SSP is set by the government in April each year. SSP may be payable for up to 28 weeks.

Paternity Leave and Pay

Paternity leave will be a right from day one of employment (previously 26 weeks). Statutory Paternity Pay remains the same and begins at 26 weeks service at the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth / adoption.

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Paternity Leave

If you are the father, partner of the mother, child's adopter or intended parent, you may be entitled to take paternity leave to look after the child and/or the mother. Paternity leave can be taken as in two one-week periods or two consecutive weeks.

Paternity leave must be taken within 52 weeks of the birth of the child or day of the placement for adoption.

Paternity Pay

You may be eligible for Statutory Paternity Pay for the period(s) of Paternity Leave to be eligible, you must have been continuously employed for at least 26 weeks at the 15th week before the baby is due (or the matching date for adoption). SPP is paid subject to meeting the statutory eligibility criteria in place at a specific rate set by the government each tax year, or at 90 per cent of your average weekly salary during the relevant period, whichever is lower.

Parental Leave

Becomes a day one right from April 2026.

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Parental Leave

Parents with a child under the age of 18 pay take unpaid parental leave. You are entitled to 18 weeks' leave which can be taken up until the child's 18th birthday. To be eligible for this leave:

- you must have or expect to have parental responsibility for the child
- the child must be under 18 years of age
- leave must be taken before the child's 18th birthday
- you must comply with requests to produce evidence of entitlement

You must book parental leave by week long blocks and may book up to 4 weeks in any year, in one block or multiple blocks. If you have a child who is disabled you may book parental leave in days.

You must apply for parental leave in writing giving at least 21 days' notice, in the unlikely event that we feel your absence would be unduly disruptive, we may postpone the leave for up to 6 months. The exception to this is where you give notice to take it immediately after the child is born or placed with the family for adoption, or if a postponement of the requested leave would result in the leave being taken after the child's 18th birthday.

Bereaved Partner's Paternity Leave

This provides unpaid leave in the event that the mother or primary adopter dies within the first year after birth or placement.

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Bereaved Partner's Paternity Leave

In the unfortunate event that the mother or primary adopter dies within the first year of the child's life or placement, as a bereaved father or partner you are entitled to take up to 52 weeks' paternity leave. This entitlement applies from day one of employment. Statutory pay will apply in accordance with the relevant eligibility requirements in force at the time.

Whistleblowing

Now provides protection from detriment when whistleblowing about cases of sexual harassment.

Probation Periods

With effect from January 2027 employees will have the right to claim unfair dismissal from 6 months of employment which will apply to employees who start work from 1st July 2026, we have made the following changes to the handbook;

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Probationary periods

You join us on an initial probationary period of 4 months (this must be less than 6 months we recommend 4 months).

During this period, your performance will be assessed and discussed with you, and you will be provided with support and guidance to enable you to achieve in your new role.

We very much hope to confirm your position as permanent but, if your work performance is not up to the required standard, or you are considered to be generally unsuitable, we may extend the probationary period, and this will be explained to you. If, regrettably, you prove to be unsuitable for the post, your employment will be terminated within, or at the conclusion of, the probationary period.

You will receive written confirmation that your probationary period has been passed and you should not consider your probationary period passed until you have received this confirmation.

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Probation Procedure

Policy Statement

A supportive probation process is important to support and train new employees starting their employment. To facilitate this, line managers set early objectives and clarify standards of performance which help the new employee to settle in quickly and get to grips with the role as soon as possible.

Probation is a two-way street. It also allows the manager to assess the employee's capability, skills and performance in the role and to address and support any problems promptly. It also allows the employee to decide if the employment relationship is a good fit for them.

This policy sets out a clear framework for the fair and consistent approach to probation and the responsibilities of managers and employees.

Commented [LR1]: I've tried to make the language less passive

The policy aims to identify the link between induction, probation and employee development processes, including the Performance Management Process.

Scope

Probation applies to all newly appointed employees and is confirmed in the contract of employment.

We do not apply probation to those who transfer between roles within the organisation, but a trial period may apply in some circumstances.

If performance or behaviour issues come up during the probation period, we usually follow a shortened version of our disciplinary and capability procedures.

The standard probationary period is 4 months, with a formal review at 2 months to assess progress. If needed, we may need to extend the probationary period, usually for a further month. The total probation period will not exceed 6 months.

Principle

In line with our commitment to diversity and equal opportunities, the probation process will be objective, transparent and free from discrimination.

The probation process should run alongside the induction process to support a positive and structured onboarding experience. It is designed to help new employees settle into their role, understand expectations, and receive regular feedback on performance and development.

Managers should hold regular check-ins throughout the probation period, as outlined below:

Timing	Focus of Meeting	Key Discussion Points	Outcome/Action
Week 1 - 2	Initial objective setting	- Role expectations - Key objectives and standards - Initial training plan	Agreement of objectives and expectations
Month 2 Review	Performance and progress review	- How the employee is settling in - Initial performance feedback - Any early concerns or support needs	Identify support/training needs
Month 2 Review	Performance and progress review cont.	- Progress against objectives - Strengths and development areas - Wellbeing and engagement - Any gaps in performance	Adjust objectives/support plan if required
Two Weeks Before End of Probation	Final review	- Overall performance assessment - Review of objectives achieved - Any outstanding concerns	Final recommendation and next steps

		- Recommendation for confirmation, extension, or termination	
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Responsibilities

New Employee

- To confirm that objectives set for the probationary period are in line with their expectations and to demonstrate commitment to achieving them with the support of their manager.
- To share any difficulties with their manager at the earliest opportunity.
- To share any learning and development needs or support they need to successfully complete the probation period.

Commented [LR2]: work with the manager to agree them?

Line Manager

- To jointly define the objectives for the new employee in line with the role during week 1 or 2.
- To meet with and gain commitment to the probation objectives from the new employee.
- To plan in and ensuring the new employee attends their induction meetings as planned.
- Arrange regular one to one meetings with the new employee to ensure a good working relationship develops and to provide feedback to the new employee.
- Arrange any agreed learning and development activities identified by the new employee.
- Complete all documentation relating to probation review meetings.
- Provide written feedback at the mid and final review meeting on the outcome of the probation period.

REMINDER

If you have employees, you MUST, be taking proactive steps to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace, this requirement will be extended to include third parties from October.

There is a risk assessment available on the Diocese website and we can signpost you to online training if required.