

OTAS BRIEF · WF-002

Employment law for event employers: the dates that matter to January 2027

Operational

Tactical

Strategic

By OTAS Insights · Published by OTAS Live Ltd · England, Scotland and Wales

Correct as of 20 October 2026

From 1 January 2027, employees in England, Scotland and Wales can claim unfair dismissal after 6 months in a job, not 2 years, and the cap on the compensatory award goes [3][4]. That follows a year of change: sick pay from day one since 6 April 2026, the Fair Work Agency since 7 April 2026 and a 6 month tribunal time limit since 1 October 2026 [1][2]. Event employers who take on crew for seasons and tours should review probation, dismissal decisions and records now.

Key takeaways

- **1 January 2027:** unfair dismissal protection after 6 months, for dismissals where employment ends on or after that date, even if notice was given earlier [4].
- **Already in force:** Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) from the first day of sickness, with no lower earnings limit, since 6 April 2026 [2][7].
- **Records:** holiday and holiday pay records must be kept for at least 6 years, since 6 April 2026 [2][12].
- **Claims:** in England, Scotland and Wales, most employment tribunal claims now have a 6 month time limit. Scotland's breach of contract claims follow on 9 November 2026 [9].
- **Do this now:** check who will pass 6 months' service in 2027, tighten probation reviews and get your holiday records in order.

Why this matters for event operations

Event work is seasonal and short term. Many crews are hired for a festival season, a tour or a winter run, and some people work for the same employer again and again. Several of the changes below turn on how long someone has worked for you, what you pay them when they are sick and what records you keep. They apply to employees and, for some rights, to workers. Whether a self-employed freelancer is covered depends on the facts of their engagement.

This Brief covers the law in England, Scotland and Wales, where the Employment Rights Act 2025 applies [6]. Northern Ireland has its own employment law, with one exception noted below.

The calendar so far

- **18 February 2026:** dismissal for taking part in industrial action became automatically unfair, and newly eligible employees could give notice of day one paternity leave and unpaid parental leave [1][2].
- **6 April 2026:** SSP from the first day of sickness and no lower earnings limit. Paternity leave and unpaid parental leave became day one rights. Disclosures about sexual harassment became protected whistleblowing. The maximum protective award for failing to consult on collective redundancies doubled to 180 days' pay. Employers must keep records of annual leave and holiday pay for at least 6 years [1][2][12]. The SSP change applies across the UK, including Northern Ireland. The other changes apply in England, Scotland and Wales [6].
- **7 April 2026:** the Fair Work Agency was established. Acas says it brings existing enforcement bodies together and takes on enforcement of other rights, such as holiday pay and SSP [2][11]. The part of the 2025 Act on enforcement extends to the whole UK, but this Brief does not cover how it works in Northern Ireland [6].
- **1 October 2026:** the time limit for most employment tribunal claims rose from 3 months to 6 months, for problems on or after that date, in England, Scotland and Wales [9][10]. Some time limit changes also extend to Northern Ireland, which this Brief does not cover [6].

What comes next

These are changes to the law in England, Scotland and Wales [6].

- **30 October 2026:** employers must take "all reasonable steps" to prevent sexual harassment, and must not permit harassment of their employees by third parties such as customers and clients [1][2]. Our earlier Insight covers this in full.
- **9 November 2026:** the 6 month time limit applies to breach of contract claims in Scotland [1][9].
- **By the end of 2026:** new tipping rules, including consulting workers on a tipping policy and reviewing it at least every 3 years [1][2].
- **1 January 2027:** the unfair dismissal qualifying period falls to 6 months and the cap on compensatory awards is removed [1][3][4]. The government also lists the duty to tell workers of their right to join a trade union, and fire and rehire protections, for January 2027 [1][2].
- **Later in 2027:** guaranteed hours and notice of shifts for zero hours and low hours workers, regulation of umbrella companies, bereavement leave, flexible working changes and more. Timings depend on consultation [1][2].

The unfair dismissal change in detail

In England, Scotland and Wales, an employee today usually needs 2 years' continuous employment to claim ordinary unfair dismissal [5]. The 2025 Act changes that to 6 months and removes the limit on the compensatory award [3]. The regulations that bring this in say it applies wherever the effective date of termination falls on or after 1 January 2027, even if the dismissal happened before then [4]. So notice given in December 2026 that ends in January 2027 falls under the new rule.

Some dismissals already need no qualifying period, for example for whistleblowing or for raising health and safety concerns [5]. Weeks covered by a contract of employment count towards the period, and some gaps can count too, such as a temporary cessation of work [15]. Whether a run of bookings adds up to 6 months depends on the facts, so take advice on individual cases.

Sick pay from day one

Since 6 April 2026, SSP has been payable from the first day of sickness absence, and there is no minimum earnings level to qualify [2][7]. The government gives the rate as £123.25 a week or 80% of average weekly earnings, whichever is lower [7][8]. The 2025 Act also removed the waiting period and the lower earnings limit for SSP in Northern Ireland, from the same date [4][6][14]. For crews paid by the shift, this means someone who is off sick for a single day may now be entitled to SSP for that day.

What to do

Operational: crew and supervisors

- If you are sick, report it the way your employer asks, from the first day. You may be entitled to SSP from day one [2][7].
- Keep your own note of the dates you worked, your holiday and what you were paid.
- If you have a problem at work in England, Scotland or Wales, the clock for a tribunal claim usually runs for 6 months, and you must contact Acas first [9][10].

Tactical: crew managers, HR and payroll

- List everyone on an employment contract with their start date, and mark who will pass 6 months' service in 2027 [3][4].
- Hold probation reviews before 6 months, record the outcome and give feedback in writing.
- Make sure payroll pays SSP from the first day of sickness, with no earnings threshold [2][8].
- Keep annual leave and holiday pay records for at least 6 years [2][12].
- Diary the time limits: 6 months for most claims, and 9 November 2026 for breach of contract claims in Scotland [9].

Strategic: owners and directors

- Treat any dismissal that will end on or after 1 January 2027 as within the new rule, and take advice first [4].
- Review contracts, probation periods and disciplinary procedures before the season starts.
- Budget for day one SSP across your crewing model.
- Watch for the 2027 changes on guaranteed hours, shift notice and umbrella companies, which may change how you engage crew [1][2].

Action box

Level	Do this
Operational	Report sickness from day one, keep your own record of shifts and pay, and know that most claims now have a 6 month time limit.
Tactical	Map who passes 6 months' service in 2027, run probation reviews on time, pay SSP from day one and keep holiday records for 6 years.
Strategic	Take advice before any dismissal ending on or after 1 January 2027, review contracts and procedures, and budget for day one sick pay.



Frequently asked questions

When does the 6 month unfair dismissal rule start?

In England, Scotland and Wales, it applies where the effective date of termination is on or after 1 January 2027, even if notice was given before then [4]. Before that date the qualifying period is 2 years [5].

Is there still a cap on unfair dismissal compensation?

In England, Scotland and Wales, the 2025 Act removes the limit on the compensatory award from 1 January 2027 [3][4].

Do the changes apply in Scotland?

Yes. The 2025 Act's employment rights apply in England, Scotland and Wales [6]. One date differs: the 6 month time limit for breach of contract claims in Scotland starts on 9 November 2026, not 1 October [9].

Is Statutory Sick Pay now paid from day one?

Yes, across the UK. Since 6 April 2026 SSP is paid from the first day of sickness and there is no lower earnings limit [2][7]. The government gives the rate as £123.25 a week or 80% of average weekly earnings, whichever is lower [7][8].

What is the Fair Work Agency?

A government agency established on 7 April 2026. Acas says it brings existing enforcement bodies together and will enforce rights such as holiday pay and SSP [2][11].

How long do I have to bring an employment tribunal claim?

In England, Scotland and Wales, usually 6 months less one day for problems on or after 1 October 2026, and 3 months less one day for earlier problems. In Scotland, breach of contract claims move to 6 months from 9 November 2026. Contact Acas first [9][10].

What we don't know yet

Exact 2027 dates for most measures, the commencement regulations for fire and rehire and the trade union information duty, and how tribunals will treat seasonal crew with gaps between contracts. The full report sets these out.

This Brief is general information, not legal advice. It covers England, Scotland and Wales unless it says otherwise. Dates can change. Check the official sources below and take advice before acting on an individual case.

Interest: OTAS Live Ltd, which publishes EPGN, sells event operations services and engages event crew.

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Planning crew for 2027 and want your event operations ready for the new employment rules?

[Request a call with OTAS to discuss how we can help](#)

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All web sources were opened and checked on 20 October 2026.

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