



Election – Spotlight on the Parties’ Workplace Manifestos

In just over a week’s time the country will go to the polls to elect a new government. How will this affect potential employment policies and what could this mean for the world of work? We take a look at each of the main parties’ policies on employment and labour issues and set them out for you to compare.

What is surprising (and unusual) is that whoever wins the approach is likely to be more interventionist than in the past, with clear changes on the horizon for employers. There are some themes which run through all the manifestos and some surprises (the Liberal Democrats want to abolish tribunal fees whilst the Green Party only wishes to reduce them, for example),

Blue, Red, Yellow, Purple or Green - you can pick your colour on 8 June!

Conservative – a pinker shade of blue?

The Conservative Party’s manifesto promises a surprisingly interventionist approach to employment policy, with pledges to improve representation of women, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities in the workplace, as well as commitments to increasing the National Living Wage and curb executive pay. The manifesto includes the following:

- Commitment to current plans to increase the National Living Wage to 60% of the median earnings by 2020 and then by the rate of median earnings.
- While recognising that the gig economy brings “considerable advantages to millions of people”, it also says “we will make sure that the people working in the gig economy are **properly protected**” following the publication of the Taylor Report.
- The rules protecting pension savers, pensioners and prudent company directors will be tightened to protect them from unscrupulous business owners, including giving the Pensions Regulator the power to issue punitive fines for those who have wilfully left a pension scheme under resourced.
- Plans to make sure that executive pay packages are subject to strict annual votes by shareholders and listed companies will have to publish the ratio of executive pay to broader UK workforce pay. Companies will have to explain pay policies, particularly complex incentive

schemes. There is also a plan to examine the use of share buybacks, with a view to ensuring that these cannot be used artificially to hit performance targets and inflate executive pay.

- In order that boards take account of the interests not just of shareholders but of employees, there will be a requirement that listed companies either nominate a director from the workforce, create a formal employee advisory council, or assign specific responsibility for employee representation to a designated non-executive director. There will also be a consultation on how to strengthen the corporate governance of privately owned businesses.
- The rights of workers and protections given to consumers and the environment by EU law will continue to be available in UK law at the point at which we leave the EU.
- A proposal to take measures to close the gender pay gap. Companies with more than 250 employees will be required to publish more data on the pay gap between men and women and there will be a push for an increase in the number of women sitting on boards of companies.
- Large employers will be asked to publish information on the pay gap for people from different ethnic backgrounds.
- A plan to “transform how mental health is regarded in the workplace”. There will be amendments to health and safety regulations so that mental health is covered in first aid training. There will be an extension of the Equality Act to extend protection against discrimination for those with mental health conditions that are “episodic and fluctuating”. Following a review, options to improve workplace mental health support will be considered.
- Companies that employ certain “vulnerable” people, including those with a disability and the long-term unemployed, will be given a year of relief from Employer National Insurance Contributions.
- The manifesto promises to get 1 million more people with disabilities into employment over the next ten years, in part through “harness[ing] the opportunities of flexible working and the digital economy”.
- With a possible eye on addressing the gender gap in the workplace the Conservatives are also proposing thirty hours of free childcare for three and four-year olds for working parents who find it difficult to manage the costs of childcare.

Labour - a return to another era or a peek at the future?

Labour have put forward a manifesto that promises broad changes to employment policy, including discrimination, union rights, the minimum wage, and executive pay. The manifesto pledges to:

- Give all workers equal rights from day one (i.e. abolish the two-year requirement to gain rights for unfair dismissal)
- Ban zero-hour contracts and ensure that workers have guaranteed hours;
- Prevent employers from undercutting the cost of UK workers with workers from overseas
- Repeal the Trade Union Act and roll out sectoral collective bargaining;
- Enhance discrimination protections by: enhancing protections for people with disabilities in the Equality Act; changing the protected characteristic of “gender reassignment” to “gender identity”; extending the time to bring a claim of maternity discrimination to six months;
- Guarantee trade unions a right to access workplaces;
- Propose four new public holidays in addition to current statutory entitlements;
- Raise the minimum wage to at least £10 by 2020;
- End the public sector pay cap;
- Amend the takeover code to require a plan in place to protect workers and pensioners;
- Roll out maximum pay ratios of 20:1 in the public sector and in companies bidding for public contracts;
- Ban unpaid internships;
- Enforce all workers’ rights to trade union representation at work;
- Abolish employment tribunal fees;
- Double paid paternity leave to four weeks and increase paternity pay;
- Increase protections for women against unfair redundancy;
- Hold a public inquiry into blacklisting;
- Re-instate protection against third party harassment;
- Use public spending power to award contracts only to companies which recognise trade unions;
- Introduce a civil enforcement system to ensure compliance with gender pay auditing.

UKIP - focusing on immigration issues

UKIP don’t say a huge amount about the workplace. UKIP are proposing to bring forward legislation which would require employers advertise jobs to British citizens before they offer them overseas and ensure employers are legally free to choose to hire a British person under the age of 25 ahead of a better qualified or more experienced foreign applicant. In addition, they are proposing to set up an independent review of public sector procurement with the aim of opening public sector contracts up to small and medium sized businesses employing less than 250 people

The Green Party - a more European Model?

The Green Party's manifesto offers a wide range of employment policies, promising to:

- Increase the minimum wage so that it is a living wage. The proposal is for a minimum wage target for everyone working in the UK of £10 per hour by 2020. In 2015 this would mean a minimum wage of £8.10 an hour generally (and £9.40 in London).
- Revive the role of democratic trade unions, including the right to belong to a union and have the employer recognise it, and the right to take industrial action, including strikes and peaceful picketing.
- Phase in a 35-hour week. The purpose of this is to improve the quality of lives and to combat unemployment by sharing available work out more equitably.
- Provide a comprehensive nationwide system of good-quality pre-school early education and childcare, free at the point of delivery.
- End zero-hour contracts.
- End the exploitation of interns, and ensure no unpaid full-time internship lasts more than four weeks
- Make equal pay for men and women a reality.
- Introduce a maximum pay ratio of 10:1 between the best paid and the worst paid in every organisation.
- End blacklisting. The proposal is to set up a full investigation into blacklisting in the construction industry and consider the creation of a new criminal offence.
- Give workers a greater say in the running of companies, including employee-elected directors in medium and larger companies.
- Reduce Employment Tribunal fees.