

BRIEFINGS

20th May 2008

Employment Law Watch

Government hands agency workers new groundbreaking deal

Improved employment rights are to be handed to an estimated 1.4 million agency workers following a groundbreaking deal announced today by the Government.

After years of campaigning by unions, the Government has agreed to table legislation later in the year which would ensure agency workers receive equal treatment, after 12 weeks' employment in any given job. This would mean agency workers would be entitled to at least the same basic working and employment conditions as their permanent colleagues.

The Government believes the deal could pave the way to reaching agreement in Europe on a new Agency Workers' Directive, whilst at the same time securing flexibility for the UK. However, the British Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses have criticised the plans and warn that firms may stop using temporary staff altogether.

There is no clear guidance on precisely what benefits and entitlements will be granted to agency workers and the Government proposes to consult on the implementation of the European Directive, in anticipation of introducing UK legislation. Nevertheless, this could be seen as the first step to improving rights for a significant proportion of the UK's workers and it is likely to have a significant impact on businesses which use agency workers as cheaper labour rather than employ their own permanent staff or to cover seasonal fluctuations in demand.

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