

Labour on employment and employment rights

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The Labour Manifesto contains some genuinely radical proposals on employment rights. Key proposals include a 32 hour working week within 10 years, funded by productivity increases, a return to sectoral collective bargaining on pay and working hours, providing for full employment protection from the start of employment and introducing mandatory employee ownership in Inclusive Ownership Funds of up to 10% of large companies. It also proposes a Ministry for Employment Rights, with representation in Cabinet.

In the Manifesto, there is recognition in a number of measures that large numbers of people in the workforce do not have employment status. There are also populist touches, including the introduction of four new bank holidays on the four national patron saints' days. But in common with much of the wider Labour Manifesto it is difficult to imagine how some of the vision could translate into reality and how, for example, sectoral collective bargaining could be achieved outside the public sector, where, to a large extent, it already prevails. Also, some of the measures proposed, particularly those on equality, have not been properly reconciled to the existing legal framework.

In addition to the headline proposals, the Manifesto intends to put forward:

- a Real Living Wage of at least £10 per hour for all workers aged 16 and over;
- strengthening protections for whistleblowers and rights against unfair dismissal for all workers, with extra protections for pregnant women, those going through the menopause and terminally ill workers;
- ending 'bogus' self-employment and creating a single status of 'worker' for everyone apart from those genuinely self-employed in business on their own account;
- introducing a legal right to collective consultation on the implementation of new technology in workplaces;
- banning zero-hour contracts and strengthening the law so that those who work regular hours for more than 12 weeks have a right to a regular contract reflecting those hours, requiring breaks in shifts and cancelled shifts to be paid;
- increases to the periods of paid maternity and paternity leave and other measures to assist families including a day one right to request flexible working and a 'ban' on the dismissal of pregnant women 'without the prior approval of the inspectorate'.
- reintroducing protection against third party harassment;
- updating health and safety law;
- overhauling trade union law on balloting, industrial action, union recognition and union representatives, and repealing the Trade Union Act 2016;
- introducing a Workers Protection Agency with inspection and enforcement powers and the ability to bring proceedings on behalf of workers including in equal pay cases;
- new Labour Courts operating in addition to employment tribunals;
- reducing the threshold for mandatory pay gap reporting to 50 employees with 'government certification' on gender equality and extending pay-gap reporting to BAME groups and those with disabilities;
- enhancing the protection of disabled workers by introducing specific paid disability leave and a new code of practice on reasonable adjustments;
- tailoring support and protections for the self-employed, including: collective income protection insurance schemes, annual income assessments for those on Universal Credit, better access to mortgages and pension schemes; free full-fibre broadband; free childcare and measures to tackle late payment of invoices.

- piloting a Universal Basic Income.

There are number of hostages to fortune here including a promise to create a single status of 'worker' that is distinguished from genuine self-employment. In practice this is not an easy distinction to draw. The requirement for consultation on new technology in workplaces is not further explained – and is again likely to lead to considerable complexity when translated into practical measures. The proposal for a far more active role for the state in enforcing employment rights may have some attractions, but would need to be properly resourced and be accompanied by appropriate checks and balances. It is likely to be seen by many employers as potentially intrusive and incompatible with business competitiveness. The proposal to ban zero hours contracts is not new, but lacks nuance – many of those engaged on contracts with high degrees of flexibility find them advantageous and arguably abusive practices would be better tackled by measures short of an outright ban.

There are many points here addressing the improvement of employment and employment rights, particularly in comparison to the Conservative Manifesto, but it is questionable how many of these proposals could realistically be delivered in a single term of office.

Click here to read about how this compares to [Conservative](#) or [Liberal Democrat](#) proposals on employment and employment rights.

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