

This information is intended to be a brief introduction to the subject. Legal information is provided for guidance only and should not be regarded as an authoritative statement of the law.

Leaflet 9

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Workplace communications

Why are communications important?

Most employees need to be instructed about their jobs. But keeping employees informed about other more general matters at work is just as essential and can contribute to the efficiency of any organisation by:

- increasing their understanding of the employer's actions
- reducing opportunities for misunderstandings between employers and employees
- improving trust between employers and employees.

Information should flow both ways - employers should listen to and take account of employees' views before action is taken. Consulting employees not only shows employees that their views are important but can also:

- provide the organisation with informed opinions based on its employees' experience
- improve commitment and morale in the firm.

What do employees need to know?

Employees need to know:

- how their jobs fit into the rest of the organisation
- about the firm - its products and services, its objectives, overall performance, managerial responsibilities and general information about the workplace
- terms and conditions of employment
- company rules and procedures
- company prospects - both good and bad
- individual performance - standards they are expected to achieve, how they are doing.

[A European directive gives employees in the UK rights to information and consultation. The directive gives employees the right to be informed about the businesses' economic situation and to be informed and consulted about employment prospects and about decisions which may lead to substantial changes in work organisation or contractual relations, including redundancies and transfers. The directive applies to businesses with 50 or more employees. The directive does not apply to businesses with fewer than 50 employees].

How can employees be kept informed?

The day-to-day contacts that take place in small firms between employer and employees can be used to pass on information. But care should be taken to communicate clearly and consistently. Nobody should be overlooked - for instance, mobile employees or shift workers can easily be forgotten. Problems can arise when employees think that information is deliberately being withheld from them.

Contact at an individual level may not always be appropriate or possible. There may be occasions when it is essential that meetings of either the whole workforce or groups within it are necessary because employees need to be informed simultaneously. This can also save management time.

Some information can best be passed on to employees in writing, particularly where it is likely to remain unchanged for a long time or where a detailed explanation is required. Three methods which may suit small businesses are:

- **A company or employee handbook** - a simple reference document can be issued to each employee containing information about the organisation. It may include details of, for example, amenities, terms and conditions of employment and company rules. A handbook does not need to be printed or expensively produced. In some cases it may require no more than stapling together various pieces of existing information
- **Noticeboards** - if well-situated and kept up to date, they can quickly and easily provide a workforce with access to information
- **Pay packet/notification** - putting information either in the pay packet or with pay notification can be a simple way of ensuring it is received.

Where can I get more information?

The Agency Helpline 028 9032 1442 gives free advice on employment matters.