

Where can I get more information?

Acas Advisory Booklets – *Employee communications and consultation* and *Redundancy handling*; Acas Rights at Work leaflet on *Information and Consultation* – to order, call Acas Publications on 08702 42 90 90 or order online at www.acas.org.uk.

DTI *Factsheets for small firms: Itemised pay statements; Written statement of employment terms; and Redundancy* – for more details, look on the DTI Website www.dti.gov.uk/publications.

HSE Leaflet *Consulting employees on health and safety*: a guide to the law. To order, phone HSE Books, call 01787 881165. For general advice on health and safety at work, call HSE's confidential Infoline on 08701 545 500.

Acas runs charged training for small firms and has a national helpline – 08457 47 47 47 – which gives free advice on employment matters.

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.

Acas can help with your employment relations needs

We inform

We answer your questions, give you the facts you need and talk through your options. You can then make informed decisions. Contact us to keep on top of what employment rights legislation means in practice – before it gets on top of you. Call our helpline 08457 47 47 47 or visit our website www.acas.org.uk.

We advise and guide

We give you practical know-how on setting up and keeping good relations in your organisation. Look at our publications on the website or ask our helpline to put you in touch with your local Acas adviser. Our Equality Direct helpline 08456 00 34 44 advises on equality issues, such as discrimination.

We train

From a two-hour session on the key points of new legislation or employing people to courses specially designed for people in your organisation, we offer training to suit you. Look on the website for what is coming up in your area and to book a place or talk to your local Acas office about our tailored services.

We work with you

We offer hands-on practical help and support to tackle issues in your business with you. This might be through one of our well-known problem-solving services. Or a programme we have worked out together to put your business firmly on track for effective employment relations. You will meet your Acas adviser and discuss exactly what is needed before giving any go-ahead.

Communicating with your employees

a two-way process

staff to management

inform management to staff

What if I get it wrong?

Poor communications can lead to misunderstandings, low morale and below par performance, as well as breaches of regulations by workers and breaches of workers' rights.

If you fail to properly inform, warn or consult an employee before dismissal (including redundancy), it is likely to be found unfair if the case comes before an employment tribunal.

What are the legal requirements?

Your employees have rights to information and to be consulted in certain circumstances.

You must:

- provide a written statement of the main terms and conditions of employment;
- provide an itemised pay statement;
- consult on matters to do with employees' health and safety and provide information to make consultation fully effective. If you recognise independent trade unions, you must consult via any safety representatives they have appointed; otherwise you can consult employees direct or via elected representatives;
- disclose information for collective bargaining purposes to recognised trade unions;
- consult individuals if you propose to make them redundant and, if you propose 20 or more redundancies, consult with employees' representatives (trade union representatives where a union is recognised) and give information about your proposals;

- inform or consult with employees' representatives when a business (or part of a business) is transferred to a new owner;
- provide a written statement giving reasons for dismissal on request, or automatically if a woman is dismissed when pregnant or on maternity leave.

All of these matters have specific requirements which you must follow so you should seek further advice (see *Where can I get more information?*).

Why are good communications important?

In a small firm, it is too easy to assume that everyone knows what is going on. Good communications can:

- ensure accurate information, instruction and guidance is provided
- facilitate the exchange of ideas and views
- reduce misunderstandings
- improve managers' performance and decision making
- improve workers' performance and commitment
- improve health and safety
- reduce costs.

How do I get it right?

- ✓ Remember that communication is a two-way process and workers should have the opportunity to give information as well as receive it.
- ✓ Give employees information about:
 - their contract, including a written statement of the main terms and conditions of employment, details of disciplinary and grievance rules and procedures, email/internet policies and whether a stakeholder pension scheme operates (you should do this within two months of them starting work);

- work objectives and performance, training, and health and safety;
- the organisation's performance, progress and prospects;
- employee benefits and facilities, and the firm's policy on equal opportunities.
- ✓ Make sure you give good news as well as bad.
- ✓ Be available to employees and talk to them regularly and hold regular meetings (for example once a week before the day's work begins) to give information and answer questions.
- ✓ Provide written information as a back-up when appropriate, particularly if the need for information is important or a permanent record is required.
- ✓ Consider using a noticeboard to display information but keep it tidy and up-to-date.
- ✓ Make sure your communications reach all workers. Don't forget part-timers, homeworkers, those working away from base (e.g. sales staff) and the receptionist and absent workers e.g. those on maternity or parental leave, career breaks or long-term sickness.
- ✓ Train managers and supervisors how to handle communications.
- ✓ Review communications regularly and ask workers how arrangements might be improved.