

Coronavirus - the impact on employment

The coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to have a significant impact on the livelihood of many people, particularly those whose work situation has been affected.

Among the 1,028 people we've helped so far, employment issues including workers' rights and access to schemes such as furlough and self employed support are increasing in number.

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

If a business cannot maintain their current workforce and operations due to coronavirus, they can furlough employees and apply for a grant that covers 80% of their usual monthly wage costs, up to £2,500. The temporary scheme started on 1 March 2020 initially due to run for four months but has been extended.

Since then we have received many queries about how the scheme works, and their rights as workers.

Furlough payments

A number of clients are concerned that their payments have been incorrect or that changes to working hours have affected the way furlough figures have been calculated.

Case study

The client had been informed by his employer that he was being put on furlough under the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. He was concerned because his employer was using his earnings in February to calculate the furloughed wage. As he'd worked reduced hours in February, taking time off that wouldn't usually have been taken, his earnings were lower than usual that month. He wanted to know if the furlough wage had been calculated correctly and what he could do to challenge it.

How we are helping

We advised the client on the correct method of calculating the wage and provided him with detailed information and clarification produced by the Government about how the furloughed monthly wage should be calculated. The client felt more confident in approaching his employers and querying the calculation.



The impact of school closures and care commitments

Due to school and nursery closures, many clients are experiencing a conflict between work commitments and caring for their children.



Case study

Our client needed help as she was unable to work from home and due to school closures she had no care provision available for her son. In addition, her employer had indicated that she would not be furloughed.

How we are helping

We advised the client of the Government recommendation that if you are unable to work due to additional caring responsibilities arising from coronavirus restrictions, then you should speak to your employer about furlough options. In addition we provided her with benefits advice in case she wasn't furloughed. After further discussions, the client's employer eventually agreed to furlough the client.

Agency workers

Case study

The client was employed for over a year by an agency and had been working in a factory. Since coronavirus restrictions were imposed, she had been informed that there was no work for her and her agency has declined to furlough her.

How we are helping

We identified that, as an agency worker, the client was eligible for the furlough scheme. We outlined her situation, employment rights and provided her with the information to support her request to be furloughed. She was further advised that if this was declined she should ask for the reasons to be put in writing and we provided information regarding her options including ACAS and Derbyshire Law Centre.

Financial difficulties due to furlough payment delay

Case study

The client had been furloughed by her employer but as the company had not received funds from the Government (due to start on 20 April 2020) the client had not been paid. She wanted to know what financial assistance was available.

How we are helping

To help with immediate financial difficulties we advised the client about the Derbyshire Discretionary Fund. We identified she was eligible for Universal Credit, assisting her on how to make a claim. She was also advised to contact her local council about deferring Council Tax payments. Looking longer term, we supported the client in being proactive in contacting her energy supplier and other creditors to explain her situation and the delay to her furlough payment.



Furlough and pregnancy

Case study

The client is pregnant and works in a care home. She had been initially furloughed but had been informed that senior management had indicated issues regarding eligibility of claiming for pregnant employees so she was expected back at work. The client was very concerned about the level of risk as there had been confirmed cases of coronavirus at the workplace.



How we are helping

The client was advised about the detail of the furlough scheme including eligibility of pregnant and vulnerable workers. She was provided with information present to senior management and to enable her to raise her concerns about returning to work. As this was possibly an employment discrimination issue we also supported her in contacting ACAS and Derbyshire Law Centre to help her if her request was turned down.

Help for the self-employed

The Government has introduced a Self-Employment Support Scheme for people who run their own business. We know from our Adviceline calls that these businesses had been significantly affected and we are expecting a large number of queries from clients about how the scheme will work and whether they qualify for assistance.

Case study

The client is self employed as a hairdresser and unable to work due to coronavirus restrictions. She knew that she couldn't access the furlough scheme and was worried about the loss of income and the uncertainty about when she would be able to return to work.

How we are helping

We outlined the grant available through the Self-employment Income Support Scheme and provided detailed information to instigate a claim with the HMRC. We carried out a benefits assessment in case she was not able to access the grant and identified that she may be able to claim Universal Credit. She was also advised to act early in contacting her local council regarding help with her Council Tax payments.

The scheme will allow a person subject to eligibility, to claim a taxable grant of 80% of their average monthly trading profits.

It is paid out in a single instalment covering three months, and capped at £7,500 altogether.

We encourage people to seek advice early. The sooner they contact us the sooner we can help find solutions.

We are committed to working within the community to provide pro-active and long-term support for our clients.

**Call our Adviceline on
0300 456 8390**

**Lines open Monday to Friday,
9am to 4pm.**

(Calls charged as 01 & 02 numbers)