



# bulletin

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## Our Terms & Conditions Are Under Attack

### Leave Under Threat • Sick Pay Cut • A Two Tier Workforce

A leaked letter from the Cabinet Office to the HR Directors of all Civil Service Departments has underlined the scope and scale of government attacks on our terms and conditions.

As we pointed out in bulletin BTB/2012/003, the government has clearly outlined a plan for mass privatisation, worse conditions and faster sackings. However, what wasn't expected was the timescale: terms and conditions are expected to be ready for the bonfire by 31 December 2012.

The government's "benchmarks" for these changes are as follows:

**Annual leave** - *a maximum of 25 days annual leave for the first year of service building up to 30 days.*

For HMRC staff, this "change" is the status quo. Nothing to worry about? Not quite – as it will amount to a reduction in some departments, and if PCS accepts the reductions there then it sets a precedent for further reductions which will affect us here. Note that, as a "maximum," it also stops us gaining more leave for staff and increases the impact of changes to privilege days, as below.

**Privilege days** - *remove or rebrand privilege days (excluding Queen's birthday).*

This amounts to a further reduction of our leave entitlements. Even presuming that the department "rebrands" rather than removes these days, this will in practice mean absorbing them into our leave entitlement. With that up for reduction as above, they will in effect go anyway – with the employer hoping we don't notice!

**Occupational sick pay** - *to start at one month full pay and one month half pay in the first year of service, rising with each year of service to five month full pay and five months half pay after five years service.*

This is a massive reduction in sick pay, the current entitlement being six months full pay and six months half pay from day one. This not only adds to the punitive sickness policy imposed in HMRC last year, but makes it easier to get rid of people for sickness earlier in their career.

**Hours of work** - *an increase to 37 hours for staff in London currently on 36 hours.*

Though in the first instance this appears not to affect us, the average working week in Britain is 42.7 hours. Outsourced HMRC staff in Bathgate and Lilyhall can be forced to do overtime. Do we really want to set a precedent for accepting increased working hours, especially with no increase in pay?

**Mobility** – *full mobility for all grades between departments as well as location.*

The importance of this clause cannot be understated. This would replace the current policy on office moves and reasonable travel distance, allowing the government to move you anywhere in the country and to any department. Not only does this raise questions about more office closures and moves, government-wide rather than department-wide, but also about how many people such a clause would force out of their jobs.

**Probation** - *consider what restrictions are placed on entitlements during probation (e.g. access to flexi-time).*

The vast majority of those reading this aren't on probation. But the government has already started the move to a casualised, temporary workforce. By removing employment benefits from probation, they set the bar to remove them altogether. First by taking them off new and temporary staff, then by forcing them from longer standing staff when the existence of a two-tier workforce undermines our bargaining power.

**Other areas under attack** – in addition to these priority areas the government have identified other policies that they want to "review" to the detriment of members – including performance management, discipline, grievance and travel and expenses.

Though the letter insists that the civil service "continues to be a good employer," the intent is clear. By seeking to roll back working conditions on the basis that they might not be available elsewhere, the government is clearly engaging a race to the bottom. If we accept them, these "reforms" will not be the last.

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