



## Helping employers deal with maternity issues at work

The most common ground of complaint the Equality Commission receives about gender discrimination, is from women who feel they have been treated unfairly either when they became pregnant or on their return to work after maternity leave.

The Commission recently supported [the case](#) of a young woman, Nicola McNamee who was dismissed from her job because she was pregnant. The Tribunal ruled in her favour and awarded her compensation of £23,000. We publicised this case to highlight the fact that the law is there to ensure that women who become pregnant don't lose their job and that they can resume their careers after their maternity leave without discrimination.

But though supporting complainants and enforcing compliance with equality law is an important part of work, most of our contact with employers is as a resource of advice and guidance. The Commission provides support and expertise to help employers of all sectors and sizes with equal opportunities issues, including advice about pregnancy and maternity. We have sections on our website specifically for small employers; setting out the legal requirements and giving practical advice on how to make sure that any employee who is pregnant, or returning to work after pregnancy, is treated properly, within the law.

It is understandable that some employers, particularly small employers, can see this legislation as a burden. But it is never right to unlawfully discriminate against employees, regardless of the size of the firm or business. Maternity is usually a brief period in a woman's whole career. Employers can normally recover 92% of Statutory Maternity Pay; and a business which qualifies for small employers' relief can receive up to 103%.

Employers often find that, through offering flexibility in their working arrangements, they are able to tap into a wider pool of talent and keep people of experience and expertise within their workforce.

The [Equality Commission website](#) is an excellent starting point for those seeking information. We would encourage all employers to visit the sections appropriate for their business. The website has been separated, for ease of use, into large, medium and small businesses. Link -

If you require further information, colleagues in our Advice and Compliance Division are also available to speak to employers directly.