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**Information and consultation of employees (ICE)**

The Information and Consultation of Employees Regulations (often abbreviated to the ICE Regs) were introduced on 6 April 2005 and apply to businesses with 50 or more employees. The regulations give employees the right subject to certain conditions, to request that their employer sets up or changes arrangements to inform and consult them about issues in the organisation

The requirement to inform and consult employees does not operate automatically. It can occur either by a formal request from employees for an agreement, or by employers choosing to start the process. If a company already has a pre-existing agreement in place to inform and consult it may not be necessary to make any changes. To be valid the pre-existing agreement must:

* be in writing
* cover all the employees in the undertaking
* set out how the employer will inform & consult employees or representatives
* be approved by employees.

Information and consultation are the basic building blocks of every effective organisation. These concepts are as crucial to the relationship between the individual workers and their line manager as they are to the parties on an employee council. Whatever the size or type of your organisation people need to talk to each other. They need to:

* exchange views and ideas
* issue and receive instructions
* discuss problems
* consider developments.

The regulations reflect this by establishing what you should be doing about talking and listening to your employees.

**Questions and Answers**

**Why should I inform and consult my employees?**

You should inform and consult your employees because it can improve:

* **organisational performance**: time spent communicating at the outset of a new project or development can minimise subsequent rumour and misunderstanding
* **management performance and decision making**: allowing employees to express their views can help managers and supervisors arrive at sound decisions that are more readily accepted by employees
* **employees' performance and commitment**: employees will perform better if they are given regular, accurate information such as updated technical instructions, targets, deadlines and feedback
* **levels of trust**: discussing issues of common interest can engender better management/employee relations
* **job satisfaction**: employees are more likely to be motivated if they have a good understanding of their job and how it fits into the organisation as a whole
* **work-life balance**: you can talk to all your staff about developing flexible working policies and practices.

**What should employees be informed and consulted about?**

The terms of any negotiated agreement reached with your employer should set out:

* the issues to be discussed
* when and how often discussions should take place.

The areas on which an employer informs and consults on are for employee representatives and your employees to agree on. If a negotiated agreement is not reached then the fall-back provisions (known as the 'standard provisions' of the ICE regulations) set out the areas where your employer is obliged to inform and consult you.

Under these provisions your employer must:

* inform you about the business's economic situation
* inform and consult you about employment prospects
* inform and consult you, with a view to reaching an agreement, on decisions likely to lead to substantial changes in work organisation or contractual relations.

If the employer fails to abide by the terms of a negotiated information and consultation agreement or the fall-back provisions, employees can raise a complaint with the Central Arbitration Committee.

**How can I best inform and consult my employees?**

To comply with the ICE regulations arrangements must cover 100 per cent of employees. You can keep employees informed through:

* one-to-one and team meetings
* company handbooks, newsletters, notices and electronic methods such as emails and intranets
* an employee forum, sometimes called a works council or joint consultative committee (JCC).

Managers should not rely on the grapevine to pass on news and information accurately.

Employee forums, works councils and JCCs are often used as a way of consulting employees. The committees are made up of managers and employee representatives who come together on a regular basis to discuss issues of concern like planned changes, working conditions, welfare and training.

Joint Working Parties (JWPs) are similar to joint consultative committees but they are usually set up to suggest ways of resolving specific issues affecting the organisation, for instance the need to change working practices, a high rate of staff turnover etc.

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