

# Chinwag!

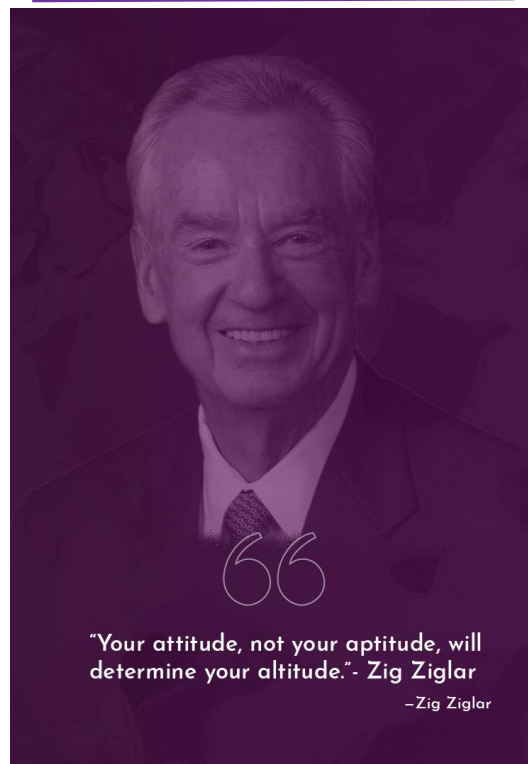
**Welcome** to the fourth edition of *Chinwag!* – bringing you an engaging blend of fascinating stories, quirky insights, and the latest from the world of workplace learning and employment law, all served with a dash of humour and a hint of wisdom.

Whether you're kicking off your morning over breakfast, commuting to work (or just strolling around the house if you're working from home), or chatting about *Chinwag!* with friends and family, we've packed plenty of conversation starters to spark your interest.

So - dive in, have a laugh, discover something new, and enjoy the journey. We're thrilled to have you back! And for those joining us for the first time – a very warm welcome to you!

Regards,

**Team Serious About Solutions**

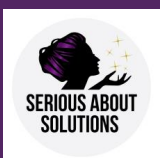


## Edition 4

28 October 2024

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## Understanding the Rights of Voluntary Workers and the Dangers of Exploitation

*Serious About Solutions* has prepared a new Fact Sheet (SAS V001) which explores the rights of voluntary workers.

In the second part of the three-part series, we examine the visa requirements for volunteers from abroad.

### Part II. Voluntary workers from abroad

Tourists are generally not allowed to engage in voluntary work in the UK unless they meet specific visa and immigration requirements. The type of visa a person holds determines whether they can volunteer during their stay. Here's an overview of the rules:



#### 1. Standard Visitor Visa (Tourist Visa):

Tourists visiting the UK on a Standard Visitor Visa are typically not permitted to do any voluntary work, as this type of visa does not allow people to engage in work activities, including volunteering. While they may take part in incidental volunteering (such as helping out at a one-day charity event), they cannot commit to regular, structured voluntary roles, especially if those roles come with any form of compensation, including accommodation or meals.

Because of these restrictions, there is no official minimum or maximum number of

hours a tourist can volunteer for under the terms of the Standard Visitor Visa.

#### 2. Permitted Paid Engagement Visa:

This visa allows visitors to come to the UK for specific paid work engagements, but voluntary work is not permitted under this visa type.

#### 3. Charity Worker Visa (Temporary Work Visa):

For people who wish to come to the UK specifically to do unpaid voluntary work for a charity, they would need to apply for a Charity Worker Visa (Temporary Work Visa). This visa is designed for those coming to the UK to do voluntary work for a charity over a longer period. The organisation must be a licensed sponsor, and the role must meet certain criteria, such as being unpaid and genuinely voluntary.

#### 4. Youth Mobility Scheme Visa:

Under the Youth Mobility Scheme, individuals aged 18-30 from certain countries are allowed to live, work, and volunteer in the UK for up to two years. This visa allows volunteering along with other types of employment.

#### 5. Student Visas:

Students studying in the UK on a valid Student Visa are generally allowed to engage in voluntary work, provided it does not interfere with the conditions of their visa (such as the maximum number of work hours allowed).

If a tourist engages in voluntary work without the proper visa, they risk breaching UK immigration laws, which could result in penalties, including being refused entry or deported.

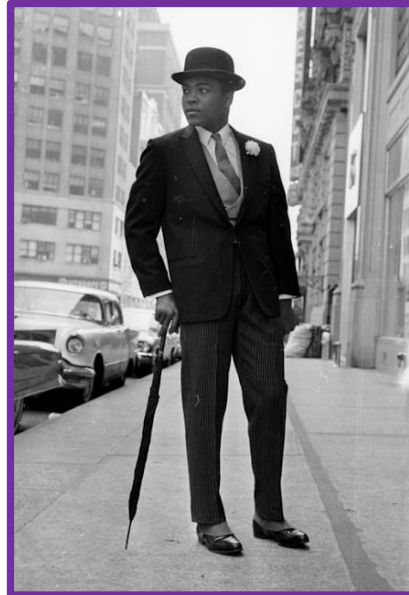
In our next edition of Chinwag! We will be looking at what to do if you know or suspect that voluntary workers are being exploited.

Make sure you're amongst the first to see this series, and all our other excellent publications, by [subscribing here](#)

## Curious Cases

### Bowler Hats and Brollies: The Unspoken Uniform of 1950s British Business

*Step back to 1950s London, a time when British workplaces were filled with sharp suits, perfectly polished shoes, and the occasional discreet flask of whisky in the desk drawer. But nothing defined British business culture quite like the iconic duo of the bowler hat and umbrella. Far from being mere fashion statements, these two accessories were the silent, unspoken dress code of the British office, each with its own hierarchy and nuances that everyone followed, yet no one dared mention.*



The bowler hat's journey began in 1849, crafted by London hatmakers Thomas and William Bowler at the request of Edward Coke, a British aristocrat who wanted a sturdy hat to protect his gamekeepers from low branches while riding on horseback. The result was a hat that was both practical and durable, ideal for both the countryside and, eventually, the bustling streets of London. Aristocrats had their top hats, but the bowler was quickly embraced by Britain's burgeoning middle class, who found in it a certain understated dignity—respectable without the ostentation of upper-class fashion. This middle-ground appeal helped it become the hat of choice for city workers, especially those in financial and administrative roles.

Fast forward to the 20th century, and the bowler had become the ultimate business uniform in London's financial district. By the 1950s, bankers, civil servants, and middle managers could be seen flocking into offices at the crack of dawn, bowlers in place and umbrellas in hand. The bowler hat itself became a badge of British resilience, a symbol of professionalism and dedication. But it was more than that—it represented status. The angle, condition, and way one wore their bowler could say a lot. A slightly angled hat might suggest mid-level management, a perfectly straight one with a serious expression belonged to senior staff, and a battered bowler with a hurried step usually indicated an intern who, back then, wouldn't dare sit down before everyone else.

The bowler's counterpart, the umbrella, carried its own set of messages. The bigger and grander the umbrella, the higher one's status. A small, battered umbrella might hint at a fresh hire, while an ornate, full-sized umbrella with a curved handle—and possibly a monogram—belonged to someone near the top. The message was clear: a gentleman's worth wasn't only in his work but in his attire. Together, the bowler hat and umbrella turned the commute into a daily performance of British decorum, where silent signals of rank and class were meticulously observed by all.

Practicality also played a role. The bowler hat's rounded shape kept it secure against wind, and it was less likely to be knocked off in the crowded, blustery streets of London. Paired with a suit and briefcase, the bowler and umbrella became the uniform of the British professional – and, for decades, a lasting symbol of British business culture.

If you are aware of any unusual traditions, laws or bylaws which could impact on the workplace, share it with us at [info@seriousaboutsolutions.com](mailto:info@seriousaboutsolutions.com) and we'll have a **Chinwag!** about it.

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## Sick of the Annual Leave Clampdown!

In this week's edition of our community advice section, we assist Michelle with her annual leave dilemma.

**Dear SAS,**

*I work in a busy office, and over the past year, I've had to cancel over four weeks of scheduled annual leave because I kept falling ill at the worst times. My manager has now told me I must take this accrued leave soon, or I risk losing it altogether. I don't want to miss out on the break I've worked hard for, but I also don't feel right taking that much time off all at once. What are my rights here? And what can my employer legally do about this?*



**Serious About Solutions say:**

*"Hi Michelle*

*First off, we're sorry to hear you've been under the weather so often! Now, let's look at the situation from both sides of the office divider.*

**Your Rights:**

*In the UK, employees are entitled to at least 28 days of paid annual leave per year, which includes public holidays. If you were genuinely unwell during any scheduled leave, you can request to have it reclassified as sick leave, preserving your annual leave for future use. Since you have four weeks of carried-over leave, your employer must allow you the chance to use it. They can't cancel your holiday entitlement but may require you to take it within a specific timeframe, particularly if holding onto the leave impacts company operations.*

**Your Employer's Rights:**

*Employers are allowed to encourage or require employees to take their accumulated annual leave, provided they give appropriate notice. Legally, this notice period must be at least twice the length of the leave they're asking you to take – so for four weeks of leave, you'd need a minimum of eight weeks' notice. This ensures they're not pulling the rug out from under you at the last minute.*

*In cases where there's a business need or operational issue, your employer can require you to take your leave at certain times. However, they should be reasonable and ideally work with you on a suitable plan. This protects your right to rest without leaving your workplace in the lurch.*

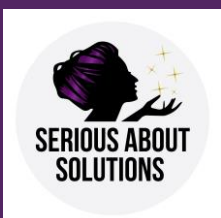
**The Way Forward:**

*Have a friendly but frank chat with your manager about scheduling your remaining leave, balancing what's reasonable for both of you. Perhaps you can stagger the time off so that it's not one long absence or, find mutually agreeable dates.*

*Remember: your right to annual leave is protected, and it's there to support your well-being. So take your hard-earned time, recharge, and let the workplace hum along without you for a bit – you deserve it!*

**Useful resources for this case study:**

- Legislation
  - Working Time Regulations 1998
- Organisation policies
  - Sickness
  - Annual leave
- Line manager (maybe trade union representative or HR if unresolved)





## Can Your Boss Force You to Socialise? The Scoop on Workplace Socials in the UK

In British workplaces, the distinction between work and social time can often blur. Many employers encourage social activities, such as happy hours and team retreats, emphasising their benefits for team cohesion and morale. However, can your boss actually compel you to socialise with colleagues outside of work hours?

The short answer is no. While employers can strongly encourage socialising, they cannot legally force participation in after-hours activities.



### What Are Your Rights?

Under UK employment law, socialising outside of contracted work hours is generally voluntary. Employees are not obligated to attend after-hours events, whether it's a Friday pub outing or a Christmas party. You have the right to decline such invitations without facing repercussions. However, if you feel pressured to attend due to potential career impacts, it's vital to understand your rights. The UK Equality Act 2010 prohibits discrimination and harassment based on protected characteristics. Religion and Belief may be particularly poignant if drinking alcohol is prohibited by faith. If declining an invitation leads to negative treatment, it could be considered workplace harassment or unfair treatment – so activities and locations should be planned with caution.

### When Employers Can Make It Mandatory

Employers can mandate attendance at events held during work hours with a work-related purpose, such as a lunch with a client or a scheduled team-building day. Even then, employers should consider individual needs, like those of employees with social anxiety or caregiving responsibilities.

### The Social Pressure Factor

Socialising can help build relationships and enhance morale in the workplace. Some employees find that attending these events strengthens their connections and contributes to their career development. Conversely, the pressure to socialise can be

uncomfortable, especially for those who prefer to separate their work and personal lives. Employers should be mindful of creating an environment that respects different comfort levels with socialising, avoiding any negative judgement towards those who choose not to engage.

### How to Navigate Workplace Socialising

If social expectations in your workplace make you uncomfortable, consider these strategies:

- **Be Honest but Professional:** If you'd prefer not to participate, politely explain that you need to maintain a boundary between work and personal time.
- **Suggest Alternatives:** Propose team lunches or coffee breaks during work hours instead of after-hours events.
- **Balance Engagement:** Occasionally attending events can help maintain connections, but feel free to skip those that don't fit your preferences.

### The Bottom Line

The choice to attend after-hours events ultimately rests with you. While employers may promote these activities for team spirit, they cannot legally force you to participate. It's essential to find a balance that works for you, respecting both your professional obligations and personal boundaries.

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1. Be Honest but Professional: If you'd prefer not to participate, explain politely that you need to keep a boundary between work and personal time.
2. Suggest Alternatives: If after-hours events aren't feasible, propose team lunches or coffee breaks during work hours as alternatives.
3. Balance Engagement: Attending occasionally can help maintain team connections, but you should feel free to skip events that don't fit your schedule or preferences.

If you still have queries about this or any other workplace matter – email us at:

[info@seriousaboutsolutions.com](mailto:info@seriousaboutsolutions.com)

## The Lighter Side

### Punching the Clock!

One amusing historical story from the UK world of work revolves around the origins of the term "punching the clock." In the late 19th century, many factories and workplaces began implementing time clocks to track employees' hours. Workers would literally punch a card in a machine to record their arrival and departure times.

However, the humorous twist comes from the fact that many employees would attempt to game the system. Some clever workers developed creative strategies to avoid being docked pay for being late. For instance, one popular method involved using a friend to punch in their card before they arrived. The friend would clock them in, then leave the premises before the boss arrived. This led to the development of a sort of "punching buddy" system.

Eventually, employers caught on to this trick. Some factories began implementing additional measures, like assigning supervisors to monitor the time clocks. This led to further antics, with workers creating elaborate distractions or even staging "sick days" to avoid getting caught.

The legacy of this humorous tug-of-war between workers and employers persists in today's world, where flexible working hours and remote work arrangements have shifted the dynamics of time management. Despite the serious nature of work, this little slice of history reminds us that humour and ingenuity often thrive even in the most structured environments.

## Talking Points in the World of Work

### This week:

The important topics are making headlines are:

1. **New Employment Laws:** Significant changes to UK employment law took effect in October 2024, including the Worker Protection (Amendment of the Equality Act 2010). This law imposes a duty on employers to take preventive measures against sexual harassment in the workplace, requiring them to implement training and clear reporting mechanisms ([HR Pulse](#)).
2. Additionally, the Employment Rights Bill introduces day-one rights against unfair dismissal, banning exploitative zero-hours contracts, and granting flexible working as a default right ([GOV.UK](#)).
3. **Addressing Economic Inactivity:** The UK government is focusing on tackling economic inactivity, which is at a concerning level due to long-term sickness, particularly post-pandemic. The Labour Market Advisory Board has been established to explore innovative approaches to increase employment and address the root causes of inactivity ([GOV.UK](#)).

The Work and Pensions Secretary has highlighted the importance of improving health services and support systems to help more people return to work ([GOV.UK](#)).

4. **Tipping Act Implementation:** The recently enacted Tipping Act mandates that employers must distribute all tips fairly among workers without unauthorized deductions. Employers must have a clear written policy on tip allocation, enhancing transparency for employees ([HR Pulse](#)).
5. **Cost of Hybrid Work:** As businesses navigate the new landscape of hybrid work, costs associated with commuting and working in the office have been highlighted. Hybrid workers report spending significantly more on office days compared to working from home, underscoring the ongoing debate about the viability and sustainability of hybrid work models ([GOV.UK](#)).

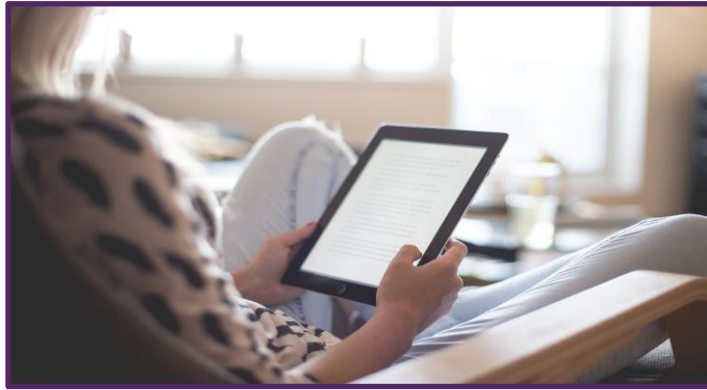
These developments reflect a broader trend towards enhancing worker rights and addressing long-standing issues within the labour market, signalling a pivotal shift in the UK's approach to work.

Employers are advised to review their policies and processes to ensure compliance with these changes.

For more details, you can check out additional resources on the changes to employment laws and economic initiatives or contact **Serious About Solutions**.

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# Readers Corner



In our Readers' Corner you get a chance to let us have your questions, feedback, diary dates and Community Spotlights.

- **Questions**  
Let us have your questions about the world of work and we will publish our expert advice in our *Chinwag!* newsletter
- **Feedback**  
Tell us what you think about our website, publications and services

- **Diary Dates**

- **13 – 14 November 2024**  
The British Business Show 2024

- **October is:**

- **ADHD Awareness Month**
- **Black History Month**
- **Breast Cancer Awareness Month**

- **November is:**

- **Islamophobia Awareness Month**
- **Transgender Awareness Month**
- **UK Disability History Month (14 Nov – 13 Dec)**
- National Stress Awareness Day (6<sup>th</sup> Nov)
- Intersex Day of Remembrance (8<sup>th</sup> Nov)
- Purple Tuesday (12<sup>th</sup> Nov)
- White Ribbon Day/UN Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (25<sup>th</sup> Nov)

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Thanks for taking the time to read this edition of *Chinwag!*

We really need your feedback so that we can continue to make improvements to our publications and services.

Share this newsletter with anyone you think might be interested in what we do here at *Serious About Solutions*.

Don't forget to [join our mailing list](#). See you in the next edition.

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## Contact us

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