

CLAS CIRCULAR

2026/2 (23 February)

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It would be very helpful if members could let us know of anything that appears to indicate developments of policy or practice on the part of Government or other matters of general concern that should be pursued.

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CHARITIES & CHARITY LAW

Israel settlements: charities

For information

The Lord Bishop of Norwich asked His Majesty's Government "what assessment they have made of the use of charitable funds originating from the UK being used to support and maintain illegal settlements in Palestine; and whether they will undertake a review of this practice".

To which Baroness Chapman of Darlington, Minister of State in the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, replied:

"Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are illegal under international law and harm prospects for a two-state solution. The Government and the Charity Commission expect charities in the UK to act lawfully, in line with their charitable purposes and for the public benefit. Any concerns about charities engaging in inappropriate or unlawful activity should be referred to the Charity Commission".

[Source: Lords *Hansard*, 17 February 2026]

Updates to information on the Scottish Charity Register

For information and **possibly for action**

The OSCR has issued [a reminder](#) to Scottish charities that from 9 March, a greater range of information will be published on the Scottish Charity Register:

- the first and last names of charity trustees will be displayed on the charity's Register entry;
- every accounts document submitted to OSCR from 9 March 2026 as part of a charity's online annual return to be published in full, without any redactions,;
- a description of what the charity is set up to do and how it does this – in the charity's own words;
- the number of staff;
- the number of charity trustees; and
- the number of volunteers.

[Source: OSCR, 19 February]

EMPLOYMENT

“Plan to Make Work Pay” and the Employment Rights Act

For information

The Government has published a timetable for changes to employment law, as follows.

“Timetable for changes being introduced in 2026:

To give workers, employers, and businesses confidence about upcoming changes, the latest timetable for changes being introduced in 2026 is set out in this document.

We continue to work towards the timetable set out in the roadmap for measures being introduced throughout 2027. We will continue to keep these timings under review as we consult and develop the details of these policies.

Measures that took effect at Royal Assent, December 2025

- the repeal of the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023

Measures that will take effect on 18 February 2026

- the repeal of the great majority of the Trade Union Act 2016, thereby simplifying requirements on trade unions, including in relation to industrial action and political funds
- removing the 10-year ballot requirement for trade union political funds
- simplifying industrial action notices and industrial action ballot notices
- protections against dismissal for taking industrial action
- employees that are newly eligible for ‘Day 1’ Paternity Leave and Unpaid Parental Leave can give notice

Measures that will take effect on 1 April 2026

- the repeal of the levy that trade unions and employer associations pay to the Certification Officer

Measures that will take effect on 6 April 2026

- collective redundancy protective award – doubling the maximum period of the protective award
- ‘Day 1’ Paternity Leave and Unpaid Parental Leave
- whistleblowing – strengthening protections for workers who ‘blow the whistle’ on sexual harassment

- Bereaved Partners' Paternity Leave – (non-MWP measure) will enable bereaved fathers and partners to take up to 52 weeks of paternity leave if the mother or primary adopter dies within the first year of the child's life
- Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) – removing the Lower Earnings Limit (LEL) and waiting period
- action plans on gender equality and supporting employees through the menopause (voluntary)
- menopause guidance
- simplifying trade union recognition process

Measures that will take effect on 7 April 2026

- the establishment of the Fair Work Agency

Measures that will take effect in October 2026

- bringing forward regulations to establish the Fair Pay Agreement Adult Social Care Negotiating Body in England
- procurement – two-tier code
- tightening tipping law
- the duty to inform workers of their right to join a trade union
- strengthening trade unions' right of access
- requiring employers to take 'all reasonable steps' to prevent sexual harassment of their employees
- introducing an obligation on employers not to permit the harassment of their employees by third parties
- introducing a power to enable regulations to specify steps that are to be regarded as 'reasonable', to determine whether an employer has taken all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment
- unfair practices in the trade union recognition process
- new rights and protections for trade union representatives
- extending protections against detriments for taking industrial action

Further measures beginning later **this year** and in **2027** can be found [here](#)."

[Source: Department of Business and Trade, 11 February]

PROPERTY & PLANNING

Places of Worship Renewal Fund: further details

For information and **possibly for action**

The Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme [closed to new applications](#) on 18 February because all the funding in the 2025/2026 budget has now been allocated.

Details of the new Places of Worship Renewal Fund continue to emerge – slowly. In answer to two written questions to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport by Simon Hoare (North Dorset, Con), Ian Murray, Minister of State at DCMS, said this:

“The Places of Worship Renewal Fund is a capital fund, meaning it will award grants for projects to cover capital works, rather than just the VAT element. Further details on the Places of Worship Renewal Fund specific criteria, application process and funding allocation will be announced in due course. The Listed Places of Worship Scheme was run on a first come first served basis. The new Places of Worship Scheme will instead target funding at areas of the most need, and Places of Worship will go through a proportionate application process. We are currently designing the criteria with experts from the sector, and have not made an estimate of numbers eligible, which will partly depend on the size of grants applied for. The fund will deliver £92 million over 4 years”.

In answer to a written question from Pippa Heylings (South Cambridgeshire, Lib Dem), he said that the Department’s evaluation of the LPWG Scheme “showed that while the current Scheme had many benefits, 80% of respondents said that they would still have carried out the work without the rebate. As we look towards a new fiscal period and the evolving needs of our community, it is essential that government support is deployed to the areas where it can have the greatest impact and where it is needed most”.

In answer to a written question from Freddie van Mierlo (Henley and Thame, Lib Dem), he said that the new Fund “will provide an equivalent overall level of financial support to that provided by the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme, £23 million per annum. The new Places of Worship Renewal Fund is a capital fund providing grants upfront, which in some cases may award a greater proportion of the project costs than what would have previously been received through the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme.

We are aware of concerns regarding the transition between the two schemes. Guidance, including eligibility criteria and application process on the new Places of Worship Renewal Fund, will be published in due course” [our emphasis].

Further information came to light during the Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee’s [oral evidence session](#) on protecting built heritage with the DCMS Minister of State, Baroness Twycross, in which she made it clear that the new Fund will be more focused than the Scheme it replaces:

“The key difference is that it is going to be targeted. The VAT model we previously used was a pretty blunt tool. The new fund, which will have £90 million over the next four years, will be targeted at areas of double disadvantage ... We are working through the criteria and how that will work in practice, because I am also clear that a postcode is not necessarily reflective of where the place of worship is undertaking its community work. So we are looking at how it will support community cohesion as well” [Q. 291]

It remains to be seen how DCMS interprets “areas of double disadvantage”.

[Source: Commons written questions, answers and statements]

Draft Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill inquiry

For information and **possibly for action**

The Housing, Communities and Local Government (HCLG) Committee has launched an inquiry examining the Government’s draft Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill. The inquiry will examine how far the draft Bill meets the Government’s own policy intentions, including its commitment to “bring the feudal leasehold system to an end”. It will also examine how far the Bill strengthens leaseholders’ rights, how the Government’s proposals for commonhold would work in practice, and plans to make commonhold the default tenure for flat ownership.

The Committee welcomes written evidence: the closing date for submissions is **25 February** and oral evidence sessions are likely to begin in early March. The Committee is also inviting homeowners to respond to an online survey, details of which are on the Committee’s website.

- [Inquiry: Draft Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill](#)
- [Terms of reference and call for evidence](#)
- [Take part in the survey: Draft Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill.](#)

[Source: Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, 4 February]

NORTHERN IRELAND

Religious education and collective worship

For information

The Northern Ireland Government is in the process of responding to the Supreme Court's judgment in *JR87, Re Application for Judicial Review* [2025] UKSC 40, in which the Court upheld the judgment of Colton J at first instance that religious education and collective worship in the school of the anonymised child applicant were not conveyed in an objective, critical, and pluralistic manner, contrary to Article 9 and Article 2 of Protocol 1 ECHR.

Paul Givan (DUP), the Minister of Education, gave some details in response to a series of written questions in the Assembly from Nick Mathison (Alliance) about progress.

On the Review, on retaining the legislative requirement for RE “to be taught according to the Holy Scriptures”, and on ensuring that RE does not present Christianity, he said that “The Supreme Court judgment made clear that the legislation itself does not prevent Religious Education (RE) being taught in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner, because schools are permitted, and now encouraged, to add broader material beyond the Core Syllabus ... The Terms of Reference for the Review explicitly required the revised syllabus to ensure that RE in Northern Ireland is taught as an academic discipline, developing analytical and evaluative skills, and ensuring that pupils explore a range of religious and non-religious worldviews, and encourages engagement with questions of belief, ethics, identity and meaning, reflecting the diversity of contemporary society.”

“I have put in place a comprehensive and transparent process for revising the Religious Education (RE) Core Syllabus. My Department has launched an open expression-of-interest process, inviting applications from experienced practitioners across all schools in Northern Ireland. This open process is designed to attract a range of applicants from across school sectors, who can provide their subject knowledge and classroom experience to the drafting process. Applications will be assessed against the agreed essential criteria. Alongside this, there will be extensive wider engagement. The specific approach is a matter for the Review Chair, Professor Noel Purdy OBE, but engagement will include an open call for evidence, public surveys, and focus group discussions involving children, young people, parents, and a wide range of other stakeholders. The process will culminate in a full public consultation.”

“The approach to drafting the revised RE Core Syllabus and the wider engagement process is a matter for the drafting group ... The Religious Education Advisory Committee has no formal role in the review process, though the drafting group may wish to engage with members of the Committee and consider previous work undertaken by the Committee and others. The Terms of Reference for the work make clear that the revised Core Syllabus should be pluralist and inclusive, specifically ensuring pupils explore a range of religious and non-religious worldviews, and encourage engagement with questions of belief, ethics, identity and meaning, reflecting the diversity of contemporary society. The Terms of Reference also set

out the need for wider engagement and consultation as part of the drafting process. The right of withdrawal from Religious Education (RE) does include partial withdrawal from specific topics or individual lessons.”

On not making changes to collective worship, he said that the Supreme Court did not strike down or question the legality of collective worship, and the duty placed on schools remains firmly in place.

“While the Court found that the arrangements for collective worship in JR 87’s school breached rights, this was because how it was delivered in that school. The finding related to ineffective withdrawal arrangements and the risk of stigmatisation not because Christian collective worship itself was unlawful. My focus, therefore, has been to ensure that every school now implements a simple, immediate, and confidential withdrawal process. I issued new guidance confirming that an unqualified right exists for parents to withdraw their children wholly or partially from RE and/or collective worship.

[Source: Northern Ireland Assembly Written Questions, 18 February]

SCOTLAND

Reform of religious and moral education (RME)

For information

The [Children \(Withdrawal from Religious Education and Amendment of UNCRC Compatibility Duty\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#), introduced to clarify the legal position on the withdrawal of pupils from religious observance in schools, was [passed in a final stage three vote at the Scottish Parliament](#).

The changes will align the relevant legislation with existing guidance on religious observance to strengthen alignment with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Once brought into effect, it will strengthen pupils' rights in relation to religious observance and religious and moral education.

The Bill was amended at Stage 2 to separate religious observance from religious and moral education in relation to the pre-existing parental right to withdraw. As a result of the change, the parental right to withdraw a child will only apply to religious observance, and it will no longer be possible to withdraw from RME.

[Source: Scottish Government, 18 February]