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Lawyer claims national minimum wage is 'ridiculous' and flouts new age laws
09 February 2007 08:01

The government's national minimum wage (NMW) is "ridiculous" and flouts age discrimination laws, according to one employment lawyer.

Carolyn Soakell, an associate at Lewis Silkin law firm, said she had no idea how the government could justify the minimum wage in the face of the age laws.

"I'm as confused as you are about the national minimum wage," she told delegates at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's (CIPD) annual Reward at Work conference earlier this week.

"It's ridiculous and it's been very controversial. There may well be some case law to challenge it soon," Soakell said.

Apprenticeship schemes aimed specifically at younger workers could also be discriminatory since the introduction of the age legislation in October 2006, according to Soakell.

"I think it's about equality of opportunity and the government wants to encourage employers to recruit younger workers," she said.

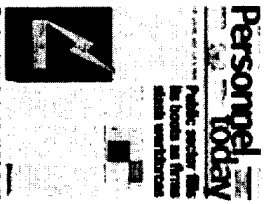
Alistair Darling, trade and industry secretary, announced earlier this month that employers who refused to pay the minimum wage would be fined £200.

In October 2006, the NMW rose to £5.35 per hour for over 21s, to £4.45 per hour for 18-21-year-olds, and £3.30 for 16-17-year-olds.

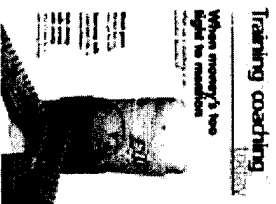
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www.PersonnelToday.com
Wednesday, 01 October 2008

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