Clock Changes: Managing Shifts, Working Hours and Pay

UK clocks move forward in spring and back in autumn. For most daytime staff the change has little effect, but an overnight shift that crosses the clock change can be one hour shorter or longer in real elapsed time. Employers should plan both the rota and the pay treatment before the shift starts.

1. What actually changes on an overnight shift?

When the clocks move forward, one local clock hour disappears. When they move back, one local hour occurs twice. A shift recorded only by local start and finish times may therefore appear to have the usual length when the employee actually worked one hour less or one hour more.

Illustrative shift	Actual elapsed time
Spring: 22:00 to 06:00 across the forward change	7 hours rather than 8 hours.
Autumn: 22:00 to 06:00 across the backward change	9 hours rather than 8 hours.
Ordinary night: 22:00 to 06:00	8 hours, ignoring unpaid breaks.

These examples assume the worker remains on duty throughout and the times use local clock time. Actual paid hours also depend on breaks, the contract and any agreed shift-payment policy.

2. Must pay change by one hour?

There is no universal rule that every employee must lose an hour’s pay in spring or gain an hour’s pay in autumn. Check whether the agreement pays a fixed salary, a scheduled shift amount or actual hours worked. However pay is calculated, ensure National Minimum Wage requirements are met for the relevant pay reference period.

Example A | Hourly paid overnight worker

An employee is paid £15 per hour for actual time worked. Their spring shift from 22:00 to 06:00 crosses the change and includes a 30-minute unpaid break.

Employer response: Seven elapsed hours minus the unpaid break is 6.5 paid hours, giving £97.50, if that treatment reflects the contract and the break was genuinely unpaid.

Example B | The autumn repeat hour

The same shift runs across the October clock change. Its elapsed time is nine hours, including a 30-minute unpaid break.

Employer response: Eight and a half paid hours at £15 would be £127.50 under an actual-hours contract. A fixed-shift arrangement may be different.

3. Check rest periods and overnight arrangements

Clock changes do not suspend working-time safeguards. Consider rest between shifts, maximum working hours where applicable, night-work limits and any site coverage that depends on a precise handover time.

4. Record hours in a way that survives the clock change

A time entry should distinguish the local clock display from actual elapsed time. Record the date, time zone or offset where appropriate, unpaid breaks and authorised amendments. Using elapsed time rather than subtracting two displayed clock times avoids the missing-hour and repeated-hour error.

Potential issue	Practical control
A duplicated 01:30 appears in autumn	Retain an unambiguous timestamp or time-zone offset.
A spring shift appears to be eight hours	Calculate actual elapsed time across the transition.
Different sites apply different pay assumptions	Check contracts and communicate the agreed treatment before the shift.

5. Before each clock change

- Identify shifts that cross the transition and confirm the actual start, finish and handover coverage.
- Explain whether staff will receive payment for actual hours or an agreed fixed-shift amount.
- Review payroll exceptions, statutory rest and the resulting time records.

How Assyst helps employers manage overnight shifts

Assyst recognises when UK clocks move forward or back and adjusts the recorded elapsed time for overnight shifts that cross the change. Its workforce scheduling, time and attendance and payroll calculation records help employers distinguish actual hours worked from the displayed local clock times. Employers can agree in advance with affected staff whether a shift will run for an additional hour or an hour less, or whether a fixed shift payment will apply, according to their contractual terms. The agreed arrangements can then be communicated clearly so employees understand the hours they are expected to work and how the shift will be paid, with the relevant attendance and payroll evidence retained.

Discuss your workforce requirements with Assyst

Assyst Workforce Management is a workforce management platform for multi-site employers, bringing together HR and paperless onboarding, time and attendance, workforce scheduling, payroll calculations, task management and a mobile staff app. To find out more or discuss how Assyst could support your business, visit www.assyst.uk and contact us through the website.

Useful official sources

GOV.UK — Night working hours and limits | https://www.gov.uk/night-working-hours

GOV.UK — National Minimum Wage | https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage

GOV.UK — When do the clocks change? | https://www.gov.uk/when-do-the-clocks-change

General guidance for employers in Great Britain, reviewed November 2026. Contract terms and individual circumstances may require professional advice.