By Nick Lipley

EMPLOYERS ACROSS the UK are expected to review the demands they place on staff following a landmark employment tribunal victory last week by nurses Christine Clunie and Alison Hale.

The pair successfully claimed they had been forced out of their posts at Melksham Hospital after new shift patterns were brought in by Wiltshire Health Care NHS Trust.

Represented by the RCN, they told an industrial tribunal that the new compulsory rotating shifts for all nurses meant they could no longer care for their children. They were both made redundant last June.

RCN lawyers proved that the nurses had been victims of 'marital discrimination', with figures showing that more than a quarter of married nursing staff were unable to comply with the change in shift.

Compensation details are expected within the next two months. But trust managers have not ruled out an appeal.

Nevertheless, the tribunal's ruling has been hailed as a landmark victory for the profession, particularly as it highlights the fact that trusts are still failing to implement the family-friendly policies advocated by the government.

A health department spokesperson said: 'It's a judgement that the whole of the NHS will need to consider, and one which other employers will wish to consider.'

RCN assistant director of legal services Chris Cox said: 'For some trusts it will serve as a reminder and for others as a warning that if they are going to introduce new working practices they have to look at the implications for their staff.'

The tribunal's report notes that trusts managers consulted staff. However, it adds: 'As far as they were concerned, the decision to introduce compulsory internal rotating shifts had already been taken and all they were doing was looking for ways to ameliorate its impact on individual nurses.'

A trust spokesperson said managers were 'very disappointed' by the ruling.

NHS is the loser over working hours

THE TWO nurses who walked out of last week's tribunal hearing victorious have declared that the big loser in the battle over working hours is the NHS.

Alison Hale and Christine Clunie have barely worked in the health service since their redundancy more than six months ago.

Together, they have more than 30 years' nursing experience. Ms Hale now works as a medical assessor for insurance companies, while Ms Clunie stacks shelves at a Somerfield supermarket and is employed one night a week at a private nursing home.

Ms Hale said: 'The NHS has lost out. The way we have been treated makes us wonder whether we will go back.'

Ms Clunie continues to work occasional shifts at Melksham Hospital, but as a bank nurse. She said: 'Everyone I work with has been very supportive. Many have been in the same position.'