



WELLBEING AND LEAVE POLICY

PURPOSE

UoNSU is committed to supporting the welfare and wellbeing of all employees. We recognise that a package of leave gives staff flexibility in managing their work, their personal and family commitments and aspirations. It helps people to maintain their health and to cope effectively with the various demands on their time. It can also be a powerful aid to staff engagement and retention, helping us to balance our respective individual and organisational needs.

This policy exists to explain the leave available as part of the overall package of employee benefits. Through the policy, we intend to maintain a healthy and high-performing workplace which reflects people's different circumstances and supports their wellbeing.

POLICY

Context

The law gives employees particular entitlements to different types of leave from work in various circumstances. In addition to this, UoNSU grants additional leave as part of an overall package of employee benefits. These various types of leave are important in giving staff time to rest and relax away from the demands of work, to deal with emergencies or unforeseen events, to care for dependents, and to manage their lifestyle activities and personal goals.

UoNSU is keen to help you to manage your home and work responsibilities in a flexible way across the year. We want to equip you to take a proactive and accountable approach to managing your own health and wellbeing, and that of those who depend on you. In doing this we intend to recognise the diversity of our staff team and the range of peoples' personal circumstances and needs.

In preparing this policy and the range of options offered within it, we intend that individuals have scope to address and respond to a wide variety of personal circumstances. In return, we ask that you take a responsible and accountable approach to how you manage your working life, and take care of your own health and welfare as much as possible. If you have any concerns about how you're managing your work, your health or your wider commitments and needs, you should feel comfortable about talking to your line manager or to HR for advice and support.

Stress

Stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them”. As an employer we have a duty of care to ensure the health and wellbeing of our staff, and it is now accepted that this includes workplace stress.

UoNSU recognises that negative stress can have a range of harmful effects for people and it is our intention to manage the risks of workplace stress as far as possible. We recognise that people are different, and that what one person finds stimulating and energising may be hard to cope with for someone else. We also recognise that pressures outside of work can impact people at work, for example, affecting their ability to manage situations they may have dealt with comfortably before. We will prepare line managers so they are aware of the various signs of stress, the organisational risk factors that can contribute to it and the range of actions that may be taken.

Where it is felt that an individual is showing signs of stress or the individual raises it, the line manager will take action quickly to reduce the pressure, and provide support for the person and their work activity. We may also inform the Health and Safety Manager so that qualified help or services can be given, where necessary.

Types of Leave

This policy outlines the types of leave available to staff, its purpose and how to take it. This includes:

- Annual Leave and Public Holidays
- University/Students’ Union Holidays
- Cultural or Faith Obligations
- Dependents Leave
- Compassionate Leave
- Unpaid Leave
- Sabbatical Leave
- Time off for Public Duties
- Trade Union Duties
- Jury Service and Attending Court as a Witness
- Leave for Members of the Reserve Forces

Note that the entitlements to Maternity, Paternity, Adoption, Parental and Shared Parental Leave are not covered in this policy, but in the Family-Friendly Policies themselves.

This policy works in partnership with our Flexible Working Policy.

Annual Leave

Annual leave is intended to allow you time to rest, to renew and to enjoy yourself away from work in support of your health, fitness and personal wellbeing. It's an important part of managing your home and work life balance, and has known health benefits including reducing stress. We want to ensure that staff always take their annual leave entitlement and, because of this, no more than 3 days/21 hours may be carried forward to the next holiday year for a full-time member of staff. This is pro-rata for part time staff.

Paid annual leave entitlement is based on length of service, as follows:

- 1st full leave year - 23 days
- 2nd full leave year - 25 days
- 3rd & 4th full leave years - 27 days
- 5th full leave year - 28 days

Annual leave should be requested in advance via the line manager. The line manager has the right to refuse a request based on business needs. There may also be times where permission is required from the relevant SLG member e.g. 'Welcome Week'. The notice required to book leave should be double the length of the leave being requested e.g. 1 day's leave should have 2 days' notice.

In addition, the following 8 public holidays are recognised and are given as paid leave:

- Christmas Day
- Boxing Day
- New Year's Day
- Good Friday
- Easter Monday
- May Day
- Spring Bank Holiday
- August Bank Holiday

University/Students' Union Holidays

Two days paid leave are given at set dates to be confirmed in advance by the HR Department. These are in addition to your annual leave entitlement and usually fall at Easter and Christmas.

Cultural or Faith Obligations

Our Values actively promote diversity amongst our staff team and an inclusive organisational culture. Flexibility will be provided wherever possible to enable you to take holidays or leave at a particular time so you can celebrate or comply with your religious or faith obligations.

Dependents Leave

The intention of this entitlement is to provide an allowance of up to 5 paid days (pro rata for part time staff) which you can use to deal with unforeseen circumstances related to dependents (e.g. child sickness, taking relatives to hospital etc). This allows you to have paid time away from work to manage such situations without using up your annual leave.

Anyone wishing to take dependents leave should discuss the reason with their line manager first. Your manager will guide you, and has discretion on both the situation and the amount of time taken, which must be reasonable. Time off under this category would be recorded on a Staff Absence Form.

Note that this leave cannot be used to supplement holidays and there is no automatic entitlement to have the full amount regardless. As annual leave is a statutory entitlement and should be used, where there is excessive leave to take and there is a possibility this cannot effectively be taken before the end of the leave year, any requests for dependents leave may be overridden by using annual leave. The same principle would apply for any Flexi Time owed and not taken. The allowance of 4 days/28 hours is the maximum and any 'unused' days can't be carried forward to the next holiday year.

Any requirement for additional leave to deal with situations which last longer than four days, or where you have already used them, will need to be agreed with your manager and taken as unpaid leave, unless covered by some other provision.

Compassionate Leave

We recognise that there may be times when staff suffer bereavement and need to take time away from work both to grieve and to carry out any related practical activities. We also recognise that there may be a range of personal circumstances amongst our staff team, including different relationships, religious or cultural observations around bereavement or the need to travel for the funeral. Because of this, this policy may not cover every set of circumstances that could arise. However, our intention is to provide a consistent level of support and help staff during these difficult times.

Your line manager will authorise any compassionate leave, whether paid or unpaid. Line managers will talk to you to understand the situation and seek guidance from HR where circumstances vary, if necessary. Below are the paid leave entitlements which will apply in the majority of cases.

Immediate Family

This will apply for relationships such as a parent, child, partner or sibling.

Paid leave will be from the date of the death until two days after the funeral, up to a maximum of two weeks. In particular circumstances where the funeral is delayed, an additional period of up to one week's paid leave will be granted. Also, where there are exceptional circumstances related to the death itself, e.g. an inquest is necessary, additional paid leave of up to one week may be granted.

You will have the option of returning to work rather than taking the two week period as consecutive days. You may take individual days instead if that suits your needs better, but these must fall within the two week period. Your line manager will authorise any single days, taking into account your circumstances and your welfare. Part days leave will not be authorised.

Other Relatives or Close Friends

This will apply for relationships such as grandparents, in-laws or close friends.

You will be entitled to one day's paid leave to attend the funeral.

After Bereavement Leave

If you are fit to return to work after the time allowed above, but would like further time off, you should talk to your line manager about the option of taking annual leave, accrued flexi time or a period of unpaid leave.

If you feel unfit to return to work to carry out the full range of your contractual duties following the bereavement leave, you should talk to your line manager about the possibility of Flexible Working Hours or a temporary adjustment in hours and/or duties. If this is not suitable or isn't successful after trying, it may be appropriate to take sick leave. This will require a doctor's Fit Note for the period of absence according to the Sickness Absence Policy.

We encourage you to talk to your line manager so that we can offer you support after your period of bereavement leave and take care of your welfare on your return to work. We will aim to apply the policy consistently, but are able to offer a range of possible options. Line managers who need support in this should talk to HR for guidance.

Unpaid Leave

Staff may request unpaid leave for periods of up to three months for personal reasons or to pursue development opportunities. This is intended to support periods of leave which aren't covered elsewhere in this policy or in the family-friendly set of policies.

Leave periods over three months should be managed under the Sabbatical Leave section of the policy.

If you wish to take a period of unpaid leave, you should discuss the matter informally with your line manager in the first instance. You should then make a formal request for unpaid leave in writing specifying the duration and purpose of the requested leave. You are asked to provide as much notice as possible when doing this so that cover for your work can be arranged where necessary. This should be double the amount of leave requested e.g. If requesting 2 months unpaid leave you should give 4 months' notice.

In deciding whether to approve or reject a request for leave, the manager will consider the purpose of the request and the likely operational implications of the absence. The manager will also consider whether other types of leave available may be more appropriate in the circumstances. Manager should talk to HR to discuss the request.

The decision to approve or decline the period of leave will be communicated to you as soon as reasonably practicable. Where your application is approved, HR will confirm in writing the start and end dates of the leave and all contractual implications.

Sabbatical Leave

There is no legislation that deals specifically with sabbatical leave or career breaks, and employers are not obliged to offer them. However, UoNSU recognises that staff may want or need to take an extended break from work during the course of their employment in order to balance their other commitments, responsibilities and interests. UoNSU is keen to support the wellbeing and personal aspirations of staff, and it may be that a period of sabbatical leave can facilitate staff having the opportunity to focus on other priorities for a time, without having to leave their employment with the organisation.

Reasons for taking sabbatical leave might include:

- Time off to take college course or a period of study
- Time off on for childcare or other caring responsibilities
- Time off to pursue a personal interest or undertake a personal project
- Overseas travel, for example for the purpose of visiting family.

Sabbatical leave may be for minimum period of 3 months up to a maximum of 2 years.

Note that the granting of Sabbatical Leave and the duration of the leave will be at our discretion. Sabbatical Leave is unpaid.

You may request more than one period of sabbatical leave during your employment. However, you will be expected to work for a minimum of two years after a sabbatical before being able to request a further period of sabbatical leave.

Eligibility

To be considered for sabbatical leave, you must have had at least two years' continuous service with us. Note that it may not be feasible to consider requests from people who don't have a permanent right to work in the UK or from employees employed on fixed term contracts.

When considering an application for Sabbatical Leave, managers will consider the following:

- The purpose or reasons for the leave
- The period of time requested
- The staff member's length of service
- The time remaining on an employment contract
- Whether the person has taken Sabbatical Leave previously
- The operational needs of the Department or the Union
- The need to retain key skills, knowledge and experience to achieve strategic objectives
- The potential to be able to cover the post on a temporary basis
- The potential for the person to return to a similar or the same post

- The potential benefits for the individual and UoNSU.

Other considerations may be relevant depending on the circumstances.

Contractual Position during Sabbatical Leave

Sabbatical Leave is a period of unpaid leave. Sabbatical Leave will not be counted as a break in service for the purposes of your statutory employment rights. However, the period of the sabbatical won't count towards service-related benefits such as occupational sickness, redundancy payments, pay awards etc. For these purposes, service before the period of sabbatical leave will be aggregated with service after it.

If you are in the pension scheme, both employer and employee contributions will stop during the Sabbatical Leave period.

You will not accrue holidays whilst on Sabbatical Leave. Any holiday owing must be taken before the start of the leave and there will be no payment in lieu for any leave outstanding. Note also that there will be no entitlement to sick pay whilst on a career break.

We will continue to meet any requirements for us to consult you on any proposed changes to your work environment or employment.

Applying for Sabbatical Leave

If you wish to apply for Sabbatical Leave, you should discuss this with your line manager in the first instance, ideally three months before you wish the leave to start where possible. You will be asked to sign a letter from the HR team. The start date and duration of the sabbatical will be subject to mutual agreement between the employee, the line manager and the SLG member.

Your line manager will inform you of the decision in writing as soon as possible and will provide reasons if it's refused. Where the Sabbatical Leave is approved, you will be required to sign a letter to confirm your agreement to the terms and conditions around it. As part of this you must be prepared to commit to an agreement to return to work on a specified date at the end of the period of leave.

Providing that this and the other conditions for sabbatical breaks are met, UoNSU will guarantee you the opportunity to return to work at the end of Sabbatical Leave. This will be either a return to the same role as you held before your break or, if it is not reasonably practical for us to offer you the same job, then a return to another job on terms and conditions which are no less favourable.

Returning from Sabbatical Leave

We will write to you at least one month before the end of your Sabbatical Leave to confirm the date on which you are expected to return to work.

If you would like to return early from your period of Sabbatical Leave, we ask you to request this in writing to your line manager as soon as possible and at least eight weeks in advance of the date on which you wish to return.

If you would like to apply to extend your period of Sabbatical Leave, you should do so in writing at least eight weeks before the agreed return to work date, where possible.

The line manager and the SLG member will give sympathetic consideration to requests to return early or to extend the period of leave. HR will provide guidance in making the decision as required. Please note however, that there is no guarantee that these requests will be accommodated. Note also that, if you fail to return on the due date and no alternative date has been agreed, you may lose your right to return to work.

We will look forward to welcoming you on your return from Sabbatical Leave. Your line manager will ensure that a re-induction process is put in place. This will include training on any new systems or procedures that have been introduced during your time away and briefing on any other changes that will affect you and your role.

Time off for Public Duties

We recognise that staff have the right to take reasonable time off work to carry out certain public duties. We want to support and encourage staff who contribute to wider society in this way and it's our intention to facilitate you doing so. We do also need to balance the effect of this time away from work on our Union, and the following explains how we will work with you to do that.

Note: this entitlement is not applicable to agency workers.

Definitions

The right to take reasonable time off work for public duties covers the following roles:

- Justice of the Peace (also known as JP or magistrate)
- Members of the following bodies:
 - A local authority (e.g. local councillor)
 - A statutory tribunal (e.g. employment tribunal)
 - A police authority
 - An independent monitoring board for a prison
 - A relevant health body
 - A relevant education body (e.g. governing or management body, a school governor)
 - The Environment Agency

The amount of time off that is considered reasonable will take into account the following:

- The actual activities being carried out. JPs are entitled to time off to perform any of their public duties. However, for members of the bodies listed above, time off is not unlimited, but would typically include attending meetings or carrying out any functions approved by the authority such as site visits or surgeries.

- The amount of time they are expected to take up.
- Any other public duties the member of staff asking for support already does.
- Operational considerations including how the duties of the role may be delegated to other staff and the degree of flexibility available to the role holder's work tasks.

Managing time off

Note that time off for public duties is unpaid. The expectation is that you will work flexibly around any public commitments.

If you wish to take time off for public duties, please discuss this with your manager and if approved complete a Staff Absence Request Form. It's helpful to provide as much notice as possible to allow time for any cover or delegation of your work to be arranged.

We will be reasonable in the amount of time you are allowed to take off. However, if you take more time than has been agreed in advance to carry out your public duties, we may deduct an amount pro-rata to your normal salary in compensation.

Trade Union Duties

UoNSU does not formally recognise any Trade Union as representing our staff as we prefer to talk to people directly. As such we aren't obliged to grant time off to any Trade Union official for carrying out their duties. However, staff representatives will be allowed reasonable time during working hours to carry out their representative duties. This will include time to conduct a meeting with staff before any meeting with us as the employer.

Jury Service and Attending Court as a Witness

Jury Service

We have a legal duty to provide staff with the required time off if they are called up to serve on a jury. In most cases, jury service is an average of ten working days but it may be longer or shorter depending on the case.

Line managers can ask a staff member to delay their jury service if their absence will have a serious effect on Union business. Managers should speak to HR for guidance if they feel this could apply. Note that jury service can only be delayed once in a 12 month period.

If you have been summoned for jury service, you should tell your line manager as soon as possible when you will need the time off and, if possible, how much. You should also give a copy of the letter confirming your jury service to your manager.

If there are times during the case when you aren't needed at court, you should return to work unless something different has been agreed between you and your manager beforehand.

You will receive your normal pay during attendance at court and any loss of earnings compensation will be paid by the court in line with their guidelines e.g. Caring responsibilities. Pension contributions will not be affected.

Attending Court as a Witness

If you are required to attend court as a witness, you should give your line manager as much notice as possible of the date of the trial and provide a copy of the letter from the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) or the defence solicitor as proof that you are required to attend court. As with jury service, we will top-up your allowance (for loss of earnings, travel costs and subsistence) so that you don't lose out on pay.

It is important that line managers and colleagues should both respect and support the staff member's need for confidentiality regarding the circumstances of the case.

Leave for Members of the Reserve Forces

As part of their commitment to the Volunteer Reserve Forces, we recognise that staff may be called-up for service or required to attend training exercises.

Under the Reserve Forces Act 1996, staff who are called-up, or recalled, into full-time service in the forces are provided with safeguards to their employment status. UoNSU recognises the additional obligations placed on Reserve Force members and will treat these cases accordingly.

So that we can support you, we ask that new recruits who are already reservists, or existing staff who become reservists, inform their line manager as soon as possible that you are, or intend to become, a reservist. This request is made purely to allow us to deal with the practical implications - you will not be disadvantaged by doing this in any way.

If you are required to attend a training exercise in your role as a reservist, you should inform your line manager in writing in advance, giving as much notice as possible of the dates and duration. Your manager will discuss with you what type of leave will best meet the requirements. In the first instance you should aim to arrange this training on days you would not normally be working if possible. If not, you may wish to take personal leave, annual leave or any unused flexi hours as to cover all or part of this. Alternatively, you can take reasonable unpaid leave with your manager's authorisation. Depending on the nature of the exercises or training, it's also possible that a temporary adjustment to working hours may be agreed as part of our Flexible Working policy. Line managers should seek guidance from HR about these different options, if required.

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