**Special Leave - FAQ**

*Is Special Leave paid or unpaid?*

Members of staff are entitled to time off. This can be with or without pay depending on the circumstances. Each situation is different and the amount of leave provided is ultimately a matter for manager discretion.

*Should all members of staff be given paid bereavement leave?*

Leave entitlement is clearly set out in the University’s Special Leave policy. Managers should be flexible when applying the policy. The physical and emotional impact of grief may mean that some bereaved members of staff become unwell and are unable to be at work for a period after a bereavement. As a result, they may take time off sick. Some bereaved members of staff may need additional time away from work to cope with their grief, make practical arrangements, or to support a bereaved child. In cases where the they feel that need time away from work but where sick leave is not appropriate, it would be good practice to offer an alternative, for example flexible or part-time working, or a period of special leave or a career break. This can be paid or unpaid. For more information, see our guidance on supporting a bereaved member of staff.

*What is a ‘reasonable’ amount of time off?*

‘Reasonable’ is not defined in the legislation and will depend on the particular situation. Relevant factors might include the individual’s personal circumstances, the severity of the situation, the potential impact on the member of staff (or in the case of illness, the individual concerned), and the ability to make alternative arrangements (for example, in the event of childcare issues, this will be more difficult to arrange at weekends).

*When does special leave apply when someone’s child is ill?*

Special leave applies in an emergency situation. This includes when a parent is contacted during the day to advise that their child is ill and needs to be collected from school / childcare, or when a child is taken ill prior to going to school / childcare and the parent is unable to make arrangements for that day. Normally that day is considered to be paid special leave, whereas subsequent days should be taken as annual leave, unpaid leave or the parent should be (wherever operationally possible) to be allowed to make the time up by working flexibly.

*In the event of bereavement, what if the funeral is abroad?*

Where a funeral is abroad, it would be good practice to accommodate time off for travel where you can accommodate this absence. This can be as paid or unpaid leave. Sometimes an individual may wish to supplement bereavement/compassionate leave with further unpaid or annual leave, where you allow this, you should let the individual choose between either unpaid or annual leave.

*One of my team is taking special leave. What should I say to the rest of the team?*

Special Leave often relates to personal issues and staff have the right to keep these confidential under data protection legislation. Good practice would be to speak with the member of staff and ask them what they would like their colleagues to be told about their absence from work. If you can’t contact them, then say as little as possible to the team. The individual can decide how much they want their colleagues to know at a later point.

*If I give a member of staff time off as Special Leave, does it mean I’ll have to give everyone the same allowance?*

The Special Leave policy clearly outlines staff entitlements. However, every situation is different, and there may be exceptional circumstances in different cases. Each event should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

*I intend to refuse a request for special leave because of the operational difficulties it will give me. How do I do this?*

Before communicating your decision, please discuss with your HR Partner. They may be able to suggest an alternative solution.

*One of my team regularly takes Special Leave for domestic emergencies. What can I do?*

In the first instance, discuss the matter with the individual informally. Identify whether or not there are any underlying factors that are causing them to make multiple requests for special leave. If there is a long term problem, discuss with the individual whether or not they want to consider other options, such as making a flexible working request. If you have reason to believe that a member of is misusing the Special Leave policy this may amount to a disciplinary matter. Take advice from your HR Partner if required.