

Public Commitments Guidance

1. Introduction

This guidance document sets out arrangements for a number of specified civic duties and public commitments. There are many other forms of public and social service, or similar office, for which arrangements have not been specified, as it is not possible to anticipate the nature and requirements of them. However, appropriate arrangements will be made to support staff undertaking such commitments in accordance with the principles and spirit of this guidance.

For pandemic-specific volunteering, please see the Pandemic Public Commitments Guidance.

2. Jury service

A member of staff undertaking the civic duty of jury service will be granted leave for this purpose. This will be paid except where it exceeds 10 working days (pro rata for part-time staff), in which case the member of staff should claim for loss of earnings through the court and a corresponding deduction will be made from their salary. Where the leave exceeds 10 working days, the People Hub will discuss the implications with the manager.

Pension contributions will not be affected.

It is the member of staff's responsibility to:

- tell their manager they have been called for jury service as soon as possible after receiving the letter, request approval for time off and provide a copy of the letter.
- familiarise themselves with the process for claiming loss of earnings (including time limits for claiming) which will be detailed in the letter from the court and on the GOV.UK website.
- where necessary, forward the Certificate of Loss of Earnings to the Staff Payments Office for completion and, once returned, include it in their claim for expenses.
- email the Staff Payments Office once they have received reimbursement from the court and provide details of the amount.

It is the line manager's responsibility to:

- discuss any request for public commitments leave initially outside the system and record it locally, consider the impact on operational requirements, ensure the request is in accordance with the Public Commitment Policy and Guidance and within the maximum that can be granted to an individual. Line managers should seek guidance from Ask People Services or the People Hub.

- agree the time off work, approve it in the system, and put in place any cover arrangements (NB: employers are obliged to allow time off work but can ask the member of staff to delay their jury service if their absence will have a serious effect on business; such instances should first be discussed with the People Hub).
- contact the People Hub as soon as it becomes clear that the jury service will exceed 10 working days so that a discussion can take place about the implications.
- ensure the member of staff passes the Certificate for Loss of Earnings to the Staff Payments Office for completion where appropriate and ensure the staff member informs the Staff Payments Office once the member of staff receives reimbursement from the court.

3. Witness

Where a member of staff is subpoenaed as a witness to attend a court of law, the loss of earnings allowance should be claimed and a corresponding deduction will be made from the individual's salary.

4. Parliament

A member of staff may stand for election to National or European Parliament. During the recognised period of the election campaign or for four weeks, whichever is shorter, they will be granted four weeks paid leave (pro rata for part-time staff). This leave will not be set against other leave entitlements.

The Open University recognises that a member of staff adopted as a prospective parliamentary candidate must attend to constituency and other political commitments, but they are responsible for ensuring that these activities do not adversely affect the performance of their University duties. Where necessary, leave will be granted within the normal holiday entitlements. If additional leave is required, this will normally be granted without pay.

If a member of staff is elected to Parliament, they must resign their University position with effect from the date that their parliamentary salary becomes payable.

The Open University will offer employment to a former member of staff who leaves Parliament within five years from the date of their resignation from the University. The offer of employment will remain open for three months from the date of leaving Parliament. The employment offered will be at an equivalent salary to the job previously held and as nearly equivalent as possible in status and duties unless mutually agreed otherwise. The University will consider sympathetically any requests for re-employment during the period between five and ten years after election to Parliament but cannot agree that they will receive special consideration.

A member of staff may accept appointment as a political agent for the period of a parliamentary election. During the recognised period of the election or for three weeks, whichever is shorter, they may be granted three weeks paid leave (pro rata for part-time staff). This leave will not be set against other leave entitlements.

A member of staff who proposes to stand for Parliament or to accept appointment as a political agent is expected to give as much notice as possible of their intention to the Head of Unit and to the Group People Director, so that reasonable arrangements can be made to cover any period of absence.

House of Lords

A member of staff belonging, elevated or succeeding to the peerage is not required to resign their University position, provided that their parliamentary commitments are compatible with the fulfilment of their University duties. The University will not meet any part of the costs of the performance of their parliamentary duties.

A member of staff who accepts Government office as a peer, will be required to resign their University position but will be offered employment by The Open University if they leave Government office within five years of resignation. The offer of employment will remain open for three months from the date of leaving office. The employment offered will be at an equivalent salary to the job previously held and as near an equivalent as possible in status and duties unless mutually agreed otherwise.

The Open University will consider sympathetically any requests for re-employment during the period between five and ten years after a member of staff accepts Government Office as a peer but cannot agree that they will receive special consideration.

5. Other specified public or voluntary commitments

Local Government

A member of staff may stand for election to the Council of a local authority and, if elected, may continue to hold their position at The Open University.

Justice of the Peace

A member of staff may accept appointment as a Justice of the Peace without detriment to their University employment.

Government and other similar committees

Where service on a Government committee would have serious implications for the discharge of University duties, the prior approval of The Open University to the appointment is required. The aim will be to arrive at a mutually satisfactory arrangement to enable the appointment to be made.

Reservists

Members of staff who request time off in respect of their commitments as a reservist, will normally be granted 10 working days (pro rata for part-time staff) paid leave in any 12 month period, as this is usually the amount required for attendance at annual training camp. However, in exceptional cases where a request is made for more than 10 days, approval may be given up to the overall maximum of 18 days as specified under 'Conditions' below, where the circumstances warrant this.

School Governor or Nursery Trustee

Members of staff who request time off related to their role as School Governor or Nursery Trustee may be granted up to 5 working days (pro rata for part-time) paid leave in any 12-month period.

Volunteering in the local community

Volunteering activities should provide recognisable benefits to the volunteer and the University, as well as benefits to the community. Although much volunteering falls outside working hours, there may be occasion to request release from University duties to volunteer (for example to attend meetings held during the normal working day).

As a general guideline, it is considered reasonable for a member of staff to take up to 5 days paid leave per year (pro rata for part time) for volunteering activities. Staff should discuss any proposal with their line manager and approval is entirely at Head of Unit discretion.

Academic related/administrative staff elected to serve on University Committees

The University wishes to encourage nominations from a diverse range of academic related and administrative staff for representation on University committees and commits to provide elected staff with a reasonable amount of time off work to undertake these commitments. The total time allocation in each case will take into consideration the requirement for preparation for/attendance at University committees and the time for travel, where this is required.

Providing clarity on the time allocation available enables managers to effectively support all staff elected to University roles. The 'Principles' addendum in Appendix 1 provides further clarity, to enable consistent decision making around the actual number of days allocated for the different committee roles.

6. Conditions

The following conditions apply to the 'other specified public or voluntary commitments' outlined in section 5 of this guidance document:

- A member of staff is free to undertake public or voluntary commitments in one or more of the categories listed in section 5 of this document, provided that such commitments do not seriously affect the performance of their University duties.
- A member of staff intending to stand for the relevant position and/or request time off is expected to give as much written notice as possible to the Head of Unit and to the Group People Director, so that reasonable arrangements can be made to deal with any organisational consequences.
- A member of staff may be granted paid leave for the purpose of fulfilling public commitments (external to the University) up to an overall maximum of 18 days (pro rata for part-time staff) in any 12-month period.
- A member of staff elected to serve on a University committee may be granted paid leave for the purpose of fulfilling this role up to an overall maximum of 18 days in any 12-month period. This is not pro rata for part-time staff.
- In deciding how many days should be granted, the Group People Director will take into account the operational needs of The Open University and the extent of the public or voluntary commitments of the member of staff concerned.
- A member of staff appointed as Mayor or Chairman or equivalent of a Public Body or similar office, may be granted up to an overall maximum of 24 days (pro rata for part-time staff) in any 12-month period for carrying out additional duties.
- The University will not meet the cost of expenses related to the public duties specified.
- Where the loss of earnings allowance is claimed (or military pay is received in the case of reservists), a corresponding deduction will be made from the individual's salary.

All commitments must be declared annually (or as soon as practicable) and will be recorded on the system.

7. Attendance allowance/expenses

Where an attendance allowance and/or other similar expenses are received, the member of staff must follow the conditions prescribed in terms and conditions of service regarding extra curricular work.

8. Useful references

Public Commitments Policy
Pandemic Public Commitments Guidance
Guidance on Employing Reservists
Guidance on Time Off for OU Club Committee Members

Appendix 1:

Principles addendum to Section 5 of the Public Commitments Guidance for academic related/administrative staff elected to serve on University Committees

The University has revised and expanded Section 5 of the Public Commitments Guidance, to include academic related/administrative staff who serve on University committees.

The University will grant up to 18 working days paid leave to staff in any 12-month period, whatever their contractual arrangement. The specific number of days allocated will be based upon the following principles, that the total entitlement to time off will equate to:

- Up to one day for attendance at each Council or Committee meeting
- Half to one day for reading papers/preparation plus
- Appropriate travel time for meeting attendance (whilst this will depend upon location, up to a maximum of one and a half days per meeting).