

Public Commitments Policy

1. Introduction

This policy aims to support members of staff in undertaking public commitments while having due regard to the operational needs of the University.

The University also wishes to encourage diverse staff representation on University committees, to include academic related/administrative staff and commits to provide clarity on the time allocation that can be allowed.

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

2. Scope

This policy applies to all University staff, although there will be wide variations on the extent to which public commitments can be undertaken without encroaching on normal duties.

3. Legal entitlement

Employers are legally required to allow employees who hold certain public positions reasonable time off to perform the duties associated with them. There is no legal obligation to pay employees for this time off.

Public duties covered by this provision are as set out in Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996.

4. Policy

The Open University will specify conditions relating to the following public official or similar office, civic duties and public commitments: Jury service, attendance at a court of law as a witness, Member of Parliament, a peer in the House of lords, Local Government, Justice of the Peace, Government committees, Reservists, School Governor and Nursery Trustees. In addition, paid time is specified for academic-related and administrative staff elected to serve on University Committees.

A specified amount of paid time off is granted by the University for each of the above commitments, offices and duties. The actual amount allocated is dependent on the type of public commitment, office or duty (see Public Commitments Guidance). There is a maximum limit of 24 days (pro-rata for part time staff, other than where serving on University Committees) in any 12-month period.

It is not possible to specify conditions for undertaking all other public commitments, as these can be so varied and diverse. Appropriate arrangements will be made, in accordance with the principles and spirit of the specified conditions in this policy.

Some commitments, such as time off for academic-related and administrative staff membership of University committees, can vary in the commitment that is required therefore making it difficult to specify time allowances. This policy, along with the related Public Commitments Guidance, sets out the principles to be followed by managers and staff to ensure fairness, clarity and consistency.

The University is also committed to supporting staff who wish to volunteer in the local community, where operationally feasible. If time off work is necessary, up to 5 days paid leave per year (pro-rata) may be approved at Head of Unit discretion.

5. Equality, diversity and inclusion

Policies are inclusive of all Open University staff, regardless of age, care experience, caring status or dependency, civil status, disability, family status, gender, gender expression, gender identity, gender reassignment, marital status, marriage and civil partnership, membership of the Traveller community, political opinion, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic background or trades union membership status.

6. Useful references

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