Chapter 13: Special Leave

1. About this Chapter

1.1 This chapter has general information about House of Commons procedures for special leave.

1.2 This chapter explains the circumstances where special leave may be available to you and where special leave will be automatically granted. Examples of circumstances where special leave may be available include:

- the need to provide care for members of your family
- parental bereavement leave
- domestic leave
- performance of public duties or voluntary public service
- Trade Union activities
- study leave
- career breaks

2. Principles

2.1 All staff may request special leave. Special leave may be paid or unpaid. It is authorised by and is at the discretion of your Line Manager and should be entered on your annual leave record. When considering your request for leave your Line Manager will take into account such issues as any untaken annual leave you might have, whether the circumstances justify granting the request and the business needs at the time you have requested the leave.

2.2 Staff should not take leave for personal or professional reasons without prior permission and approval. In the case of an emergency where you have not been able to give prior notice, you should contact your Line Manager as soon as possible on your first day of absence. You are expected to use your annual leave as far as possible for dealing with private matters.

3. Caring Leave

3.1 Caring leave is available to enable you to fulfil your caring responsibilities in cases where your assistance is urgently needed. It is intended to cover short-term emergencies. This means that it is available only to enable you to deal with the initial needs of somebody who depends on you or to make arrangements for their care. If you wish to stay off work longer to provide care yourself, or if you know in advance that you will need to take time off work, you may be able to arrange this with your Line Manager by taking another form of leave.

3.2 The amount of time which it will be reasonable for staff to take off will depend on the nature of the issue but is usually subject to a maximum of five days per annual leave year (pro rata for part-time staff) although Managers have discretion to authorise more in exceptional cases.

3.3 Examples of the type of situation that caring leave is intended to be used for are set out below:

- to provide assistance if a dependant falls ill, gives birth or is assaulted or injured
- to make arrangements to provide care for a dependant who is ill or injured
- on the death of a dependant or close relative including attendance at the funeral
- to deal with an unexpected disruption in care arrangements
• to deal with an incident involving your child while they are at school
• To attend a medical appointment (including one that is pre-planned) with a dependant. However, as with your own medical appointments, these should be made outside working hours whenever possible.

3.4 For these purposes a dependant may be:
• a spouse or partner
• a child
• a parent
• a close relative
• someone who lives in the same household but is not an employee, tenant, lodger or boarder
• someone who relies on you for care or assistance if they are ill or injured or to make arrangements for their care

3.5 You will not be penalised in any way for taking caring leave. If you need to take caring leave you must seek permission from your Line Manager as soon as you can. Your Line Manager, or their representative, will be responsible for authorising caring leave if appropriate. Your Line Manager will also arrange for Payroll Services to be notified of any caring leave for monitoring purposes.

3.6 Caring leave should be noted on annual leave records and managers should include it on the weekly absence return noting whether it is paid or unpaid.

4. Parental Bereavement Leave

4.1 The House provides parental bereavement leave and pay to support employed parents who lose a child under the age of eighteen or who suffer a stillbirth after twenty four weeks of pregnancy.

4.2 All eligible staff can take two weeks parental bereavement leave with full contractual pay. A week for parental bereavement leave is the same number of days that you normally work. For example, a week of parental bereavement leave would be two days if you only work on Mondays and Tuesdays.

4.3 You can take the two weeks together or one week at one time and one week at another. You can decide when you want to take the leave, but it must be taken within 56 weeks from the date of the death of your child.

4.4 You are entitled to two weeks parental bereavement leave for the loss of each child. For example, if you lose two children (or twins at birth), you will be entitled to four weeks parental bereavement leave.

4.5 A link to guidance for staff and managers on parental bereavement leave is given below.

Parental bereavement leave guidance

5. Domestic Leave

5.1 Domestic leave is available to cover emergencies such as burst pipes and other domestic emergencies. It is expected that in most cases one or two days will be sufficient although managers can authorise more in exceptional circumstances. However, further domestic leave will generally be unpaid. Domestic leave should be noted on your leave record in the usual way.
6. Performance of Public Duties

6.1 Staff who become Justices of the Peace (JPs) or who take on other public duties, are entitled to reasonable time off for these duties. The amount of leave allowed, and whether it is paid or unpaid, will depend on how much time is required, how much has already been taken for this purpose and the effect of your absence on the work of your area. If you are considering taking on such responsibilities you should speak to your Line Manager. Line Managers can obtain advice from the HR Advisory Service.

6.2 Public duties may include membership of any of the following:

- a local or police authority
- a statutory tribunal
- a NHS trust or health authority
- the governing body of a school or college
- a prison board of visitors

Members of the auxiliary or reserve forces

6.3 Staff who are members of the auxiliary or reserve forces may be allowed leave to attend training courses or camps. Before volunteering to join these forces you must obtain the written consent of your Managing Director or Head of Office. If you receive a call-up notice, special leave will be granted for the period of your absence. This will usually be unpaid.

Jury service

6.4 You will be granted special paid leave whilst undertaking jury service. When you receive a call for jury service, you should inform your Line Manager immediately. The normal expectation is that everyone summoned for jury service will serve at the time for which they are summoned. In exceptional circumstances, where the business of the House means that it is not reasonable for you to serve at that time, your Line Manager will ask you to seek a deferral from the jury summoning officer.

Attendance at court as a witness

6.5 You will be granted special paid leave if required to attend court as a witness. You must let your Line Manager know immediately if you receive a notification that you are being called as a witness.

7. Trade Union Activities

7.1 You may be granted leave to carry out specified duties connected with Trade Union or Whitley Committee business (see chapter 7).

8. Study Leave

8.1 If the House of Commons is supporting you to take higher or further education you may be eligible for study leave (see chapter 16).

8.2 You should give your Line Manager as much notice as possible when booking study leave. Certain qualifications taken as part of professional development within your role may require additional time because of the intensity of the subject. This will be agreed between the Line Manager and the Head of Profession.
8.3 You have the right to request unpaid time off from work for training and study for accredited, recognised training or for specific unaccredited business skills. Requests for unpaid study time should be made to your Line Manager.

9. Career Breaks

9.1 The career break scheme allows you to take a break without leaving the employment of the House and having to start your career again. The primary purpose of a career break is to enable staff to meet family commitments or to undertake further education. For example, you may be granted a career break to provide long-term care for a dependant, to accompany a partner to work in a distant area, to cope with domestic responsibilities or to undertake full-time study.

9.2 There is no automatic right to a career break and the following general principles apply to all staff:

- you are eligible for a career break if you have completed your probation and have a good record for attendance and performance
- the scheme is open to everyone regardless of pay band
- Career breaks will last for no longer than five years in total. If you arrange to take less time you can ask for an extension up to the maximum allowed, but there is no guarantee that this will be agreed.
- you may have more than one career break but in total you cannot have more than five years in total during your employment
- after your break, you are eligible to return to a job at the same level within your pay band, unless this is not reasonably practicable. However, you will not necessarily return to the same post or to the same team.

Applying for a career break

9.3 You must write to your Line Manager giving your reasons for wanting the break and the dates when you want it to start and end. Please apply as early as possible (at least three months’ notice would be helpful wherever possible). The length of the break depends on individual circumstances.

9.4 Although every effort is made to deal with any applications sympathetically, approval depends on House of Commons business needs and the operational needs of your team. In some areas it is difficult to accommodate lengthy absences and no one is entitled to a career break. You will be notified of any reasons for refusal.

During your career break

9.5 Individuals on career breaks remain members of staff during their absence and are normally expected to undertake 10 paid days’ Keeping in Touch (KIT) activities a year either as work activity or training. The House of Commons expects staff on career breaks to maintain and update their skills and knowledge but recognises that additional training may be required on their return to work.

9.6 Your Line Manager will ensure that you are kept informed of developments at work by:

- sending you staff notices
- advising that you register for vacancy alerts
- telling you if the availability of work for your return changes
9.7 Please ensure that you:

- keep in contact with your team
- tell Payroll Services of any changes of address, email address or telephone number
- try to take up any opportunities your team provides for training or work. You may be asked, or apply, to do this for up to 10 days each year.
- give Payroll Services at least six months’ notice of your return to work.

9.8 You should not normally undertake paid work for another employer during a career break, but your Line Manager may agree to a request to take on other work in some circumstances and where there will be no conflict of interest.

Effect on your conditions of service

9.9 Time spent on a career break does not count towards reckonable service for the purposes of pay, sick pay, leave or pension entitlement. See chapter 9 for information about pay on return from a career break.

9.10 During your break you:

- will not lose your entitlement to any benefits you have earned in the past, such as a higher leave allowance
- if during your break, you undertake some work or have training at the request of the House, you will be paid and this payment will count towards your reckonable service for your pension
- will remain an employee of the House of Commons Service, and terms and conditions of your employment still apply
- must still observe House rules on conduct and behaviour and the rules relating to outside appointments. For more information please see chapter 18.
- remain a member of the House of Commons pension scheme. As a member of the pension scheme you will still remain eligible for death in service benefits.
- remain eligible for promotion. You should register for vacancy alerts so that you are aware if a suitable vacancy arises.

Returning to work

9.11 You need to give six months’ notice of your date of return. Your Line Manager will arrange to discuss with you the jobs available, your preferred working pattern, for example full or part-time, and any training needs and your return date. You are encouraged to be as flexible as possible.

9.12 You will return to work in a suitable job at the same pay band, unless this is not reasonably practicable, but not necessarily in the same post or the same team. The House will adhere to the management and redeployment of supernumerary staff procedure in trying to secure a suitable post for you (please see chapter 8). More information is on the Intranet at:

Management and redeployment of supernumerary staff procedure (PDF 354 KB)

9.13 If you decide not to return from your career break you should write to your line manager, who must also inform Payroll Services.
Career breaks and maternity leave

9.14 If you have a baby during a career break, you are not entitled to maternity leave. However, your career break may be extended for up to one more year, provided that it does not exceed five years in total. Some people choose to take a career break after their maternity leave finishes. For more information on maternity leave please see chapter 14.

Return to the Staff Handbook.