

## Guidance on staff requests for annual leave due to religion or belief reasons

Durham University has a long-standing commitment to responding appropriately to the needs presented by its faith communities. There is no automatic right to time off for religious obligations. Requests will normally be requests for annual leave and the University will give reasonable consideration to requests.

Below are some key points for consideration, which have been adapted from the ACAS *Guidance on religion or belief discrimination*. A full version of this document can be accessed [here](#).

- Staff members, in making a request, are asked to be reasonable and flexible in taking into account the demands of their job and the needs of the University. As with any annual leave, the more advance notice that can be provided of requests, the better, so as to facilitate proper consideration of the request and any impact on colleagues or students, and any discussion that might be desirable about it
- Requests should be considered in line with requests from any colleague asking to take annual leave. Line managers should give reasonable consideration to requests and be flexible where possible. It is recognised that it may not be possible to accommodate requests where, by way of example, they might cause serious disruption to the University or its students, or put too much extra work on other staff, or negatively impact upon a task which is an essential part of the job. We must be able to demonstrate a sound business reason for declining the leave request. To support this, managers should normally discuss the request and explore any concerns with the colleague, documenting and setting the rationale for the decision and be able to justify this, where necessary. If the business can function satisfactorily while a staff member is on annual leave, then where possible they should approve the leave request.
- Line managers should not unreasonably turn down a request from an employee because another employee of the same faith has made a different request or no request. In considering requests, a line manager must not favour the needs of one religious group over another so colleagues of a different religion, or no religion or belief, are at a disadvantage.

For example, where time off is sought for religious observance during a religious festival, the line manager, in making their decision, should take into account its effect on other members of staff regardless of religion or belief. This would include the effect of:

- business and workload impact (including cover arrangements, if required) during the leave.
  - allowing the request on other employees who might also want time off during the same period, and
  - the possibility of direct or indirect discrimination on another protected characteristic.
- It should also be noted that not all followers of a religion or belief will necessarily make similar requests. Their levels of adherence to the religion, or beliefs concerning that religion, could vary. For example, one staff of a particular faith may ask to take all of a religious holiday, another part of the holiday, while another may make no request. In some instances, an adjustment to the working day to allow time to attend a prayer meeting before or after

work for example, may be all that is requested. Also, some requests may include taking the day before a religious holiday or festival for religious reasons.

### Further sources of information and advice

Staff members who have any questions regarding the above points or who are in need of advice on matters relating to taking annual leave for religious reasons can speak with any of the following:

- Their line manager in the first instance (for staff submitting a request)
- Their relevant HR advisor or HR business partner: <https://www.dur.ac.uk/hr/contacts/>
- The University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Unit: [edi.team@durham.ac.uk](mailto:edi.team@durham.ac.uk) or their respective Faculty EDI leads (or Deputy Executive Deans – People and Culture), where applicable
- The University's Chaplaincy Network is able to provide specialist advice in relation to religious observances: [chaplaincy@durham.ac.uk](mailto:chaplaincy@durham.ac.uk). Information on major religious observances in the UK and their likely impact on learning and working can be viewed [here](#).