



Polasaí agus Nósanna Imeachta/Policies and Procedures

Code	QA141
Title	Shorter Working Year Scheme
Policy Owner	Director of Human Resources
Date	26/06/2009; Latest review date: 18/09/2023
Approved By	University Management Team

1.0 Policy Statement

The Shorter Working Year Scheme supersedes the Term-time Scheme and will allow any public servant an opportunity to take not less than 2 and not more than 13 weeks of unpaid leave for any reason at any time during the year. A maximum of 3 periods amounting to 13 weeks in total may be applied for.

The scheme will apply from the date of the below circular, Circular 14/2009 (see Appendix, below).

2.0 Eligibility and Description

Any public servant who is not on probation on the date where it is proposed to take the leave can apply for the Shorter Working Year Scheme. While applications will normally be facilitated where possible, the University can refuse applications where business delivery could be affected.

Applications should be submitted to the Human Resources office by emailing leaveschemes@universityofgalway.ie by the 30th of November of the previous calendar year. This is to allow arrangements to be made to spread salary payments over the year, for annual leave balances to be updated, and also enables managers to plan effectively for operational requirements and staff absences.

In exceptional circumstances the University will consider applications submitted after the above date subject to the person not availing of the salary spread arrangement in respect of pay. Any such applications should be in writing as soon as is reasonably practicable but not later than six weeks prior to the proposed commencement date of the period of leave.

You must indicate on your application the period and time of year that you wish to take special leave. While it is expected that the leave will be granted, the business needs may preclude the granting of some or all of the leave. You must be prepared to discuss alternatives, if feasible, with your Head of Unit/School.

3.0 Responsibilities

Name	Responsibility
Director of Human Resources	Policy Owner
All Staff	Give the required notice of intention to avail of this leave, completing the appropriate application form
Line Manager	Initial approval of leave application; Read and comply with this leave policy and ensure the leave application is reviewed and submitted to HR promptly
Human Resources Office	Final approval of leave application; Review this policy on a regular basis in light of any changes in legislation

4.0 Related Documentation

- [Shorter Working Year Scheme application form](#)



5.0 Appendix

- Appendix 1: Circular 14/2009 – Shorter Working Year Scheme, Dept of Education & Science

Appendix 1: Circular 14/2009 – Shorter Working Year Scheme, Dept of Education & Science

26 June 2009.

Circular 14/2009 – Shorter Working Year Scheme

1. This circular supersedes any previous Term Time Circular. The purpose of the shorter working year scheme is to permit public servants to balance their working arrangements with outside commitments, including the school holiday periods of their children. Under the terms of the scheme, special leave is available as a period of not less than 2 and not more than 13 consecutive weeks. The leave may be taken as one continuous period, or as a maximum of 3 separate periods each consisting of not less than 2 weeks and not exceeding 13 weeks in total. The period of leave shall be unpaid special leave (see paragraph 12).

Eligibility to apply

2. To be eligible to apply for unpaid special leave, a person must be serving in an Agency in an established or unestablished position (full-time staff, worksharers and other part-time staff are eligible to apply). Officers on probation at the time it is proposed to take the special leave are not entitled to participate. A public servant on special leave retains their public servant status and is subject to all relevant legislation and codes, including the code of conduct and the disciplinary code.

Annual leave and public holidays

3. Subject to the provisions of the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997 (“the Act”), the annual leave allocation of a participant may be reduced to take account of the period of special unpaid leave.

4. The Act provides that an employee who works at least 1,365 hours in a leave year is entitled to an annual leave allowance of 4 working weeks (20 days). In calculating how many days’ holidays an employee may be entitled under the Act, employers should include all hours worked including overtime, time spent on maternity (including unpaid maternity and adoptive leave), adoptive or parental leave, as well as holidays and public holidays taken during the calculation period.

5. Annual Leave - Full Time Staff: Persons serving in a full time capacity who avail of special leave will, in the absence of any other additional unpaid leave, be entitled to a minimum of 20 days annual leave. Staff with an annual leave allowance in excess of 20 days will have their allowance reduced on a pro rata basis. However it must be noted that if no other unpaid time off is taken, the officer will still receive 4 working weeks (20 days) as a statutory entitlement. [See examples in appendix A.]

6. Annual Leave - Worksharing Staff: Worksharers who avail of special leave will also have their annual leave entitlement calculated in accordance with the provisions of the Act as set out in the relevant Worksharing circulars.

7. Public Holidays - Full Time Staff: The entitlement of participants to the benefit of any public holidays falling within the period of special leave is determined by the provisions of the Act. An employee who has not been absent for more



than 13 weeks prior to the public holiday is entitled to benefit from the public holiday. The employer shall determine which of the following a fulltime employee is entitled to:

- a) a paid day off within a month of that day;
- b) an additional day of annual leave;
- c) an additional day's pay.

8. **Public Holidays - Worksharing Staff:** For worksharing staff who avail of special leave the employer shall determine in accordance with the Act which of the following an employee is entitled to:

- a) 1/5 of their weekly total of hours off within one month;
- b) 1/5 of their weekly total of hours to be added to their annual leave;
- c) 1/5 of their weekly pay (equal to 1/10 of their fortnightly pay).

Restriction on taking leave

9. The starting date for special leave will be agreed by the officer with local management (see paragraph 22), having regards to business demands, including the need to train replacement staff if any. Subject to the discretion of management participants will not be granted leave (paid or unpaid) in the four weeks immediately prior to and following the period of special leave. This restriction will not apply to leave, the granting of which is governed by statute, such as maternity, adoptive, parental or carer's leave.

10. Staff who commence maternity or adoptive leave during special leave retain their normal statutory entitlements.

11. The granting of sick leave in the four weeks immediately prior to and following the period of special leave will remain subject to the normal rules.

Arrangements for the payment of salary

12. As stated in paragraph 1, the period of special leave is unpaid. However, those participating in the scheme may apply for special administrative arrangements for the payment of part of basic salary during the period of special leave provided that an application in writing by a certain date, determined by the Agency, is made in the year prior to the year in which it is proposed to avail of the special leave. There may be some variations between salary payments in different periods of the year but every effort will be made to ensure equal payments of basic salary. If a person availing of these special administrative provisions in respect of pay takes other unpaid leave during the twelve month period, then the pro rata rate of salary will be adjusted accordingly.

Persons availing of the special administrative arrangements for the payment of salary may not vary their working hours during the same year. Each participant is required to give an undertaking that any overpayment that may arise from their participation in the scheme will be repaid to the Agency not later than the last day of the tax year, 31 December, unless otherwise agreed.

13. Staff should note that, under PRSI rules a person availing of special leave is not earning during the period of leave and is not therefore making PRSI contributions (A person paying Class A PRSI requires 39 insured weeks in the relevant tax year to qualify for benefits. The relevant tax year for a PRSI claim is the last complete tax year before the start of the Benefit Year. The Benefit Year starts on the first Monday in January). Staff availing of special leave should contact the Department of Social & Family Affairs to clarify their individual position. It is the responsibility of the person availing of the scheme to make arrangements to ensure that any voluntary contributions (e.g. health insurance, savings plans, etc.) normally deducted from salary continue to be paid.

Social Welfare - Family Income Supplement

14. Persons in receipt of Family Income Supplement who intend to avail of special leave must contact the Department of Social, & Family Affairs to clarify their entitlements.



Reckonable service

15. The period of special leave will reckon for the purposes of increments and seniority. The period of special leave will not reckon for pension purposes.

Sick Leave

16. Participants may not avail of sick leave during the period of special leave.

Restriction on Career Breaks

17. A person taking special leave who avails of administrative arrangements for the payment of salary over twelve months may not take a career break in the same year in which he or she avails of special leave.

18. However, in exceptional circumstances, at the discretion of the Personnel Officer, a career break may be granted in the same year in which a person avails of special leave. Any overpayment which may have arisen as a consequence of taking special leave would have to be repaid to the Agency prior to the commencement of the career break.

Promotion

19. Participants in the scheme will continue to be eligible for promotion while on special leave, subject to their meeting the usual eligibility criteria. Participants in the scheme who attend for interview, or who sit examinations as part of internal or interdepartmental promotion competitions, during normal working hours or on Saturdays, while on special leave, will receive leave in lieu. An offer of promotion made to a participant during the period of special leave may, in certain circumstances, be conditional on the person resuming duty in the higher grade with immediate effect.

Filling of ensuing vacancies

20. Agencies should normally reallocate or re-organise work or staff, where any vacancy arises under this scheme. The filling of vacancies arising through persons availing of special leave, including through the granting of higher duty allowances, will be subject to current Government policy on public service numbers and, in particular, the moratorium on recruitment and promotion.

21. Where specifically sanctioned, the recruitment of staff on a temporary basis to replace staff availing of special leave should be in accordance with such agreed procedures that may exist with the relevant staff unions from time to time for the recruitment of staff to the public service and must be carried out on the basis that Agencies remain within their agreed whole time equivalent staff complement. Temporary staff should not be retained for a period greater than a year. In the case of retired public servants appointed as temporary replacement staff, pension abatement arrangements, as appropriate, will apply. Where staff return from a career break granted under a previous circular (for example, for educational purposes) to fill a vacancy (Staff on Incentive Career Break under circular 13/2009 are not eligible to fill vacancies), such service will be regarded as a temporary suspension of their career break and will reckon for purposes of seniority, increment and superannuation purposes. An officer returning in such circumstances will return at the grade at which he or she was serving prior to the career break, if appointed to a vacancy at the same grade.

Applications

22. Persons wishing to avail of special leave must apply each year to participate in the scheme to their parent Agency. Each Agency should inform staff of the procedure for making applications, including discussions with line management, and to whom applications should be addressed. Applications for special leave under this scheme shall generally be made in writing by a certain date, determined by the Agency, in the year prior to the year in which it is proposed to avail of special leave. Persons applying to participate in the scheme will be required to state the period and time of the year that they wish to apply for special leave. Applicants must understand that business needs may preclude the granting of the special leave that they have applied for and they must, in such circumstances, be prepared to discuss possible alternatives, if feasible (paragraph 26 below refers).



23. Agencies may, at their discretion, indicate that they will consider applications for periods of special leave of up to eight weeks at any time from a person who has not applied to participate in the scheme in accordance with paragraph 22, subject to the person not availing of the special administrative arrangements in respect of pay. Any such applications should be in writing as soon as is reasonably practicable but not later than six weeks prior to the proposed commencement date of the period of special leave.

24. While Agencies are asked to grant applications for special leave as far as possible, the needs of the work may require that some or all applications will have to be refused. The operation of the scheme is subject to the operating requirements of Agencies not being adversely affected. It is also important that the absence of staff on special leave does not place an undue burden on the staff remaining in the workplace. Agencies should consider the work patterns and anticipated leave needs of those remaining in the workplace when considering whether an application will impact upon operating requirements.

25. Agencies may decide, where not all applications can be granted, to set out the grounds on which priority will be given to applications, for example, priority to be given to staff who have not previously availed of special leave under this scheme (or Term Time Leave under the relevant Circular). Agencies have discretion to refuse some or all of the applications made.

In particular, an Agency may refuse an application for special leave under this scheme in the following circumstances -

- the person has specialist or hard-to-replace skills,
- the person works in a location or area where an absence would be difficult to accommodate for the proposed period of special leave,
- where there are a number of applications from a particular location or work area for special leave under this scheme,
- where there are or will be a number of persons on reduced work hours or other types of leave, including statutory leave, in that location or area under other schemes, or
- any other stated reason.

26. Agencies should consider, in advance of refusing any application, whether an application for a different period of special leave or a different time of the year would be acceptable and, if so, discuss changing or deferring the period of special leave with the applicant. Where applicable, Heads of Business Units may, in consultation with relevant staff, wish to arrange for staggered periods of special leave (e.g. over the summer months).

27. Persons whose applications are accepted will be required to confirm, in writing, that they wish to avail of the relevant period of special leave without pay. It will not be possible for a participant to withdraw or to alter an application for the scheme once that undertaking has been given if they have applied for special salary arrangements. An offer of participation must be accepted within five working days of the offer being made to a person. Failure to do so will be considered as a refusal. An offer may then be made to another person.

Queries

28. Officers should address queries in relation to this circular to the Personnel Section of their parent Agency.

Review

29. The scheme will operate for a period of 3 years. At the expiry of that period the operation of the scheme will be reviewed by the Department of Education and Science in consultation with the staff unions.

Philip Crosby
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External Staff Relations

Department of Education & Science