

Working Hours Review

As members will be aware the Bank has been looking at what changes if any it can make to work parameters to allow a closer fit between what it sees as work demands and staff supply. The Bank says that typically it experiences problems:

- between 4pm and 8pm
- on the first and last weeks of the month
- during school holidays
- at weekends.

The Bank has told LTU that in order to assess its options, the Bank wants to survey staff on their existing work patterns and preferences.

Whilst this may seem quite reasonable, the important question is what protections will be made available to staff who are quite happy working the patterns they are on now but who, for whatever reason, are unwilling or unable to change?

LTU has a clear understanding with the Bank that where an employee has worked on the same work pattern for more than six months, that pattern may not be changed without agreement and that changes to contracted hours, in this case parameters, should be purely voluntary. Neither are staff under any obligation to discuss or provide any reasons for not wanting to change their hours.

The Bank must adhere to that policy in implementing any future changes in work patterns.

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Of course, if staff themselves wish to change their work patterns they have that opportunity through the Bank's Work Options policy.

Work Options, negotiated by LTU, allows staff to seek changes in their work patterns to better suit their own personal circumstances. The policy provides for a full discussion to take place over any request and for a written explanation to be provided if the request is declined for any reason.

What Work Options should not be, however, is a vehicle for the Bank to try to persuade individual staff to change their work patterns to suit its own needs. Members should be wary of any individual approaches under the guise of a Work Options review.

I will keep members informed of developments, but if any members are approached to change their work patterns against their will they should contact the Union's 24 Hour Advice Line on 01234 262868 immediately for independent, professional advice and guidance.

Compassionate & Emergency Leave

The Emergency & Compassionate Leave Policy LTU negotiated with the Bank has been the subject of discussions with Telephony recently because it is clear that the policy is still inconsistently understood and applied.

As a result the Bank has told LTU that it is to undertake some refresher training with Managers and Team Leaders to explain how the policy is meant to work.

However, it is worth reiterating the Bank's policy and providing some practical examples of how it should be applied.

As well as Compassionate and Emergency Leave I will also look at the separate rules governing time off for what the Bank describes as "doctors', dentists' and other appointments of a personal nature".

UK legislation requires employers to give time to their staff to look after their dependants. The Bank's Compassionate and Emergency Leave policy, which is designed to meet the requirements of legislation but which goes much further than the legislation demands, also fits in with the Bank's aim of helping staff maintain a sensible work / life balance.

When is time off allowed?

In general the Bank allows paid (and unpaid) time off for compassionate or emergency situations which arise in relation to either dependants or family members. Examples of what the Bank itself believes should be included as reasons for granting time off under this rule include;

- **Your child is too ill to go nursery and alternative childcare arrangements cannot be made until the next day**
- **An elderly neighbour who lives alone breaks his leg and you are closest on hand at the time**
- **A family bereavement occurs and you need to attend the funeral or help with funeral arrangements**
- **Your elderly mother is rushed to hospital after injuring herself and you need to go and discuss treatment with the hospital staff.**

Clearly this list is not exhaustive and other similar situations will arise which will require time off at short notice. The policy also provides wide scope for interpretation of what the Bank views both as dependants as well as family members.

- **Dependants include not only close family members but also other people who may rely on you in an emergency situation.**
- **Family members are stated as including wider family such as cousins, aunts and uncles.**

Bank policy, therefore, is wide ranging and should cover most situations where time off is required at short notice or for compassionate reasons.

What time off is allowed?

Bank policy goes further than is required by legislation by allowing paid time off for compassionate and emergency leave. General guidance is that the first day or two should be

paid. It is also important to understand that this is the first day or two on each occasion and is not added up during the year or the quarter or whatever. The Bank is also clear that if further time off is required in relation to the same event then this too should be allowed. For example, time off may be needed at the time of the death of a close relative; further time off will then normally be appropriate to arrange and/or attend the funeral.

Time off after the first day or two should be allowed when needed but may or may not be paid. After the initial emergency has been dealt with further time off may be granted using a mix of:

- **further paid leave,**
- **unpaid leave,**
- **annual holiday or**
- **additional Parental Leave (only in cases involving dependant children).**

Decisions over how much further paid leave is appropriate will be at the discretion of the manager involved.

Only in cases of long-term illness requiring regular and frequent time off (the Bank suggests periods over six months) will it be appropriate to look at any change to an individual's contracted work pattern.

Time Off For Personal Appointments

The Bank's policy covering time off for personal appointments is separate from other policies covering ordinary holidays or other leave for compassionate, emergency or other purposes. It can be best summarised as follows, which is a paraphrasing of what is set out in the staff manual.

- **As far as practicable, doctors', dentists' and other appointments of a personal nature should be made outside the normal working day. If a staff member has to attend an appointment during the working day then time off may be granted by your line manager. Provided these occasions are kept to a minimum, they will normally be paid.**

On that basis time off for normal check-ups with Doctors, Dentists, Opticians or the like should be allowed as paid time off.

In circumstances where an employee is going through a long period of treatment where regular and frequent appointments are required, such as chemotherapy or physiotherapy, the Sickness Absence Policy should apply instead.

LTU Advice

Members requiring advice or assistance on these or any other issues should contact the Union's 24 Hour Advice Line on 01234 262868 to speak to a full-time official for independent, professional advice and guidance.

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