

## Disability Leave Proposal

### Summary

The proposal is to introduce Disability Leave within the University of Sussex.

### Terminology

It should be noted that throughout this document where the phrase ‘disabled colleague/member of staff’ is used, this is to ensure alignment to the terminology adopted within the University of Sussex which is informed by the [social model of disability](#). However it is important to note that this term covers any colleague who falls within the relevant definition in the [Equality Act 2010](#).

### Context

The University has a number of people-related policies/procedures and benefits that were being considered as part of a Pay and Conditions Review. This review was paused in 2024 due to financial pressures facing the University. However, the proposal to introduce Disability Leave is made because the University believes it is an important addition to our approach to provide reasonable adjustments for disabled staff under the Equality Act and is an affordable improvement in the current context.

*Note: Disability Leave is a phrase increasingly used and typically refers to planned leave for a disability related reason for a fixed period of time that was known about in advance. It is distinct from sickness absence (for any reason).*

### Current Position

Within the University there is a lack of clarity regarding the University’s position on Disability Leave. The most relevant text is within the [‘Leave and Absence From Work’ guidance](#) section 4 ‘Special Leave with Pay’ part a (‘Visits to doctor and dentist’) which states:

“Time-off for visits to the member's doctor and dentist for personal treatment may be (and normally should be) granted on request although members of staff are expected whenever possible to arrange the timing of such visits so as to minimise lost working time. If it appears that the number of such visits or hours off is becoming excessive the HR Business Partner / HR Associate should be consulted.”

There is also some [guidance for staff and line managers](#) on absence related to a disability which was introduced August 2024 to draw together the relevant information available while awaiting work on this procedure ([an Inclusive Sussex action](#)). This current guidance encourages open communication to ensure accurate recording, and appropriate support or adjustments.

However, there remains a benefit in clarifying the University’s position on Disability Leave.

## Roles benefitting from this proposed improvement

- Any role within the University.

## Proposal

The proposal is the introduction of a new Disability Leave Procedure which will seek to ensure that there is a consistent approach by leaders and managers regarding the support provided for disabled colleagues **to take planned appointments where requested and approved in advance**. The proposal is detailed in Appendix A: Disability Leave Procedure.

## Next steps

1. 19 June -18 July 2025: Formal consultation with trades unions
2. By 18 July 2025: Undertake an Equality Analysis, including engagement with staff networks in particular the Staff Disability Network and Neurodiversity Staff Network
3. 19 June -18 July 2025: Invite feedback from the Business Disability Forum
4. 19 June -18 July 2025: Also provide a draft to staff and leaders (via a suitable webpage) for any feedback via a dedicated feedback form
5. 21 July- 8 Aug 2025: based on feedback, HR to review/refine proposals to UEB
6. 19 Aug 2025: *pending 1-5*, seek endorsement by UEB (meeting 19-8) for implementation from October 2025
7. September 2025:
  - a. communicate outcome to staff, unions, staff networks and unions
  - b. develop guidance on new procedure for leaders and managers to support consistent implementation. Commence development of HR system changes to record disability leave
  - c. update Workplace Adjustments Toolkit
8. Implement from 1 October 2025.

## Relevant Documents

Appendix A: Disability Leave Procedure (proposed)

## Relevant Links

[University HR policy pages](#);