



SONIC HEALTHCARE
UK

Staff Policy

Special Leave Policy & Procedure

Version 2



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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Sonic Healthcare UK recognises the need for all staff to balance their work responsibilities with their domestic and family responsibilities. Sonic Healthcare UK places great importance on considering requests for leave from employees, which fall outside the scope of annual leave for a variety of reasons, fairly and equally.

2 Purpose

- 2.1 The aim of this policy is to provide alternative special leave options to employees and managers in emergencies and exceptional circumstances. Managers have the discretion to view each employee's case individually and according to circumstances in light of service requirements. In addition to this, managers can consider whether the leave should be paid or unpaid and may take into account previous usage of special leave in specific circumstances as outlined in this policy.
- 2.2 Leave granted under this policy is not intended for long-term domestic and family needs. In the event that longer periods of time off work are required reference, should be made to the Flexible Working Policy.

3 Duties

3.1 Employee's Responsibilities

- To provide as much notice as possible when requesting special leave to ensure service needs are met, where possible
- To provide the reason that special leave has been requested.
- Follow Sonic Healthcare UK's Special Leave Policy and Procedure at all times.

3.2 Line Manager's Responsibilities

- To ensure fairness, equity and consistency in the application of this policy.
- To ensure that any special leave granted is appropriate.
- To ensure that all applications for leave should be considered in light of the individual circumstances and needs of the service.
- All approved applications for special leave are recorded on CoreHR.

3.3 Human Resources Department Responsibilities

- To provide interpretation and advice on this policy and procedure to ensure that it is followed, fairly, objectively and consistently.

- To ensure that effective implementation and embedding of this policy and procedure through education and regular monitoring activity.

4 Definitions

4.1 Special leave with pay

Special leave days shall be paid on the same basis as if the member of staff has been at work on that day including any enhancements, and in line with the employees contractual terms and conditions.

4.2 Special leave without pay

Special leave without pay may be granted at the discretion of the Company. The Company should be as flexible as it can be to accommodate special leave. When considering granting special leave without pay, managers could consider the impact to the service and any previous special leave taken.

4.3 Dependant

A Dependant is defined as:

- the employee's spouse or civil partner
- the employee's child
- the employee's parent
- a person who lives in the employees household (excluding tenants, lodgers, boarders and employees)
- any other person who relies on the employee to make arrangements for provision of care where the normal arrangement is disrupted or terminated.

4.4 Immediate Family Member

An immediate family member is defined as:

- Spouse
- Civil Partner
- Parent
- Partner

- Child
- Sibling

While we recognise that other relationships may be considered as immediate family, it is not practical to list every possible family set-up in this policy. However, the company

acknowledges that there may be circumstances where an employee lives with or is primarily supported by relatives not listed above, and in such cases, these individuals should discuss with their line manager for review of support available.

4.5 Additional Discretionary Leave

Requests for additional special leave whether paid or unpaid may be considered on a case by case basis at the discretion of the business. While there is no fixed entitlement, decisions should be guided by the following criteria:

- Nature of the request: The reason for leave should be clearly stated via email. And reflect exceptional personal, family or compassionate circumstances.
- Impact on service delivery: Managers should assess operational feasibility, including cover arrangements and service continuity.
- Previous leave history: consideration may be given to any recent special leave granted, including frequency and duration.
- Fairness and consistency: Decisions should be made in line with organisational values and applied consistently across team (s).
- Managerial discretion: Approval rests with the line manager, who must review the request and determine whether paid or unpaid leave is appropriate. The line manager should respond to the special leave request, consider all the above points, and write to the employee with clear reasons if the request is declined. If the requested leave is longer than two weeks, approval must be sought from the senior manager.

4.5.1 Requesting Special Leave

- Employees must formally request special leave in advance wherever possible, and approval must be obtained before leave is taken.
- In exceptional circumstances where prior notice is not feasible (e.g., family emergencies), employees should notify their manager at the earliest opportunity.

4.5.2 Appeals

- Where a request is declined, the employee may appeal the decision to HR for further review.

5 Policy Development

- 5.1 Every 2 years or in light of legislative changes or further guidance being issued and at Management or Staff Side request.

6 Policy Principles

- 6.1. Entitlement to apply for special leave starts from the first day of employment. An employee does not need to be employed with the company for a minimum period.
- 6.2. All applications for special leave should be submitted by the employee to their line manager at the earliest opportunity. If special leave is needed for an emergency and the member of staff cannot make the request in person, they should speak to the line manager via telephone. The employee should explain the circumstances and how much special leave they are requesting.
- 6.3. All applications for special leave should be considered promptly. Line managers can consult HR for further advice if required.
- 6.4. There is no specific amount of time that employees are entitled to take off, other than that it should be “reasonable” in the circumstances. The Company’s expectation is that any time off would only be one or two days, however this should be approached with flexibility depending on the employee’s circumstances.
- 6.5. In some cases it may not be possible for special leave to be granted, in those circumstances, the manager should communicate this in writing to the employee and explain why the request has not been approved.
- 6.6. In circumstances where special leave has not been approved and the employee fails to attend for work, management should take informal steps to understand why the employee failed to attend work and the circumstances around this. In some instances, it may be considered unauthorised absence and may be managed in line with the Investigation and Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

7 Policy Procedure

7.1 Types of Special Leave

- 7.2 **Bereavement Leave** - In the event of the death of a member of the employee’s immediate family as defined in section 4.4 the employee should contact their manager to request bereavement leave as soon as reasonably practicable.
 - 7.2.1 All employees, from their first day of employment, are entitled to request bereavement leave. Managers will consider each request on an individual basis, taking into account both the employee’s circumstances and the needs of the service. In assessing a request,

managers should consider factors such as the employee's relationship to the deceased, any domestic or caring responsibilities, and any travel requirements.

7.2.2 The Company will pay up to one week bereavement leave, following the loss of longterm partner, parent, or immediate family member, with manager's approval. If further leave is required, the employee may take annual leave or, if this is not possible, unpaid leave at Manager's discretion.

7.2.3 Special consideration may be made for employees that need to travel abroad due to the death of a relative or partner. This may require a combination of leave (including annual leave, special leave, or unpaid leave for example).

7.2.4 Although there are no specific notice requirements for informing the Company of the request to take time off, this should be done as soon as reasonably practicable (although this does not have to be in writing).

7.3. Carer's Leave (Paid)

7.3.1 From the first day of their employment, employees are entitled to one day paid leave to provide emergency care for a dependent, on up to two occasions per rolling 12 month period (unless contractually entitled to an alternative paid carers leave policy).

7.3.2 This leave is not intended for planned or pre-booked care arrangements, but exists to provide employees with immediate short term support when an emergency occurs regarding a dependent. A dependant is defined in section 4.3 of this policy.

7.3.3 Where longer-term periods of leave are required, employees can request parental leave, annual leave or flexible working subject to line manager approval. Please note that parental leave may only be requested in week blocks, it cannot be requested and approved to cover individual days less than 1 week.

7.4 Carer's Leave (Unpaid) - Employees are entitled to unpaid leave (unless contractually entitled to paid carers leave) to give or arrange care for a 'dependant' who has:

- a physical or mental illness or injury that means they're expected to need care for more than 3 months
- a disability (as defined in the Equality Act 2010)
- care needs because of their old age

For full details on this leave type please refer to www.gov.uk/carers-leave

- 7.4.1 The dependant does not have to be a family member. It can be anyone who relies on them for care.
- 7.4.2 Employees are entitled to carer's leave from their first day of work with Sonic Healthcare UK, and can take up to one week of leave every 12 months. A 'week' means the length of time they usually work over 7 days (e.g. if someone usually works 3 days a week, they can take 3 days carers leave).
- 7.4.3 Employees must give managers sufficient notice before they want their leave to start. If the request is for half a day or a day, the notice period must be at least 3 days. If the request is for more than one day, the notice period must be at least twice as long as the requested leave. For example, if the request is for 2 days, the notice period must be at least 4 days. The notice period needs to be in full days, even if the request includes half day amounts.
- 7.4.4 The request does not have to be in writing and employees do not need to give evidence of their dependant's care needs.
- 7.4.5 Managers cannot refuse a carer's leave request but can ask the employee to take it at a different time. They can only do this if the employee's absence would cause serious disruption to the department.
- 7.4.6 If they delay it, the manager must:
- agree another date within one month of the requested date for the leave
 - put the reason for the delay and new date in writing to the employee within 7 days of the original request, and before the requested start date of the leave.

7.5 Emergency leave

- 7.5.1 In some cases employees may require time off to deal with an emergency. E.g. fire, flood, burglary. There is no specific amount of time that employees are entitled to take off, other than that it should be "reasonable" in the circumstances. The Company's expectation is that any time off would only be one or two days at a time in order to deal with an emergency, however this should be approached with flexibility depending on the employee's circumstances.
- 7.5.2 Employees should inform their manager as soon as possible of their request for leave, and the reason for the leave is required.

- 7.5.3 Managers should review the request in light of the service requirements and the individual's circumstances and whether there have been any previous requests for emergency leave within the last 12 months (both those that have been agreed or refused).
- 7.5.4 There may be times when a request for emergency leave cannot be approved; in these circumstances a manager should talk to the employee to explain their decision to reject the leave request. If the employee remains unsatisfied with manager's decision, the employee can raise a grievance in line with the grievance procedure.
- 7.5.5 In the event that a request for emergency leave is rejected, and the employee fails to attend work, management should take informal steps to understand why the employee failed to attend work and the circumstances around this. In some circumstances it may be considered unauthorised absence and may be managed in line with the Investigation and Disciplinary Procedure.
- 7.6 Study Leave -** Employees may be entitled to paid time off for study leave for a course which has been approved by the Company. The application for study leave is embedded in the training form process in which employees identify what time will be needed to complete the course or qualification and is reviewed and approved locally by management. Please review the **Company Training Policy**.
- 7.6.1 Study leave is only applicable for courses that have been approved by the company and are associated with the employee's current role. For more information regarding this, please review the **Company Training Policy**.
- 7.7 Sabbaticals and Extended Breaks –** The Company does not provide paid or unpaid time off for sabbaticals or extended breaks from the company, unless otherwise stipulated within your contractual terms and conditions.
- 7.7.1 Annual leave may be requested for a period of up to 2 weeks, any request for a longer period of annual leave would need to be made in writing and reviewed and agreed to by a Director.
- 7.8 Jury Service –** Since attendance at a court is mandatory for either jury service of witness service, employees are granted special leave on full pay. Employees called to attend court should inform their manager giving as much notice as possible. The employee should provide their manager with a copy of the court summons and other relevant documentation which should be submitted to Payroll (i.e. a Certificate of Loss of Earnings or Benefit form).

- 7.8.1 The employee will continue to be paid while on jury service at the normal rate of pay subject to the deduction of any monies received from the court in respect of loss of earnings. The employee will receive a Certificate of Loss of Earnings or Benefit form which will need to be provided to Payroll to complete. Payroll will fill in the necessary information and return it to the employee before the first day of jury service starts.
- 7.8.2 In exceptional circumstances, where a manager determines that an employee's absence for jury service would seriously impact service delivery, the organisation may ask the employee to apply to the court for a deferment or exemption.

8 Other Special Leave Requests

- 8.1 Sonic Healthcare UK recognises that there may be circumstances not covered within this policy, that may require leave or time off from normal working hours.
- 8.2 Although decisions to accept or reject Special Leave requests will be made on the basis of service requirements and appropriateness, the following can be requested to

cover other special leave (such as Public/civic duties, Armed forces duties, medical or dental appointments, religious or cultural days off):

- Annual Leave
- Unpaid leave, change of working rota to accommodate particular days - Request to make the time up.

9. Related Documents and Policies

- Flexible Working Policy
- Managing Absence Policy
- Investigation and Disciplinary Policy
- Grievance Policy and Procedure
- Training Policy

10 Approval and Ratification

Name of Document: Sonic Healthcare UK Special Leave Policy and Procedure

This policy was agreed between Management and Staff Side at the HSL Partnership Group Meeting in December 2025.

Name of Management Chair:

A Nason

Signature: 

Alwyn Nason (Mar 3, 2026, 3:40pm)
03 Mar 2026

Date: _____

Name of Staff Side Chair ratifying this document: Audrey Bonnick on behalf of Beverley Wallace (staff side chair)

Signature: 

Audrey Bonnick (May 28, 2026, 6:22pm)
28 May 2026

Date: _____

Date of Next Review: December 2027

11 Document approval.

Document Approvals are recorded within the document record card within Sonic Healthcare UKs electronic quality management system (e-QMS).

Approved documents will be marked as active in the footer of the document. Documents that are not marked approved are not considered controlled. Printed copies are not permitted. Records of approval and reference copies of procedures are available from HR@tdlpathology.com.

12 Change Details

Change Request number	Change Detail	Implemented in Version Number
Table Text	Table Bullet	Table Text
Table Text	Table Bullet	Table Text
Table Text	Table Bullet	Table Text

13 Appendix

Leave Type	Purpose	Notice Required	Paid or Unpaid	Duration Entitlement
Bereavement Leave	Time off after death of immediate family or long-term partner.	ASAP	Up to one week	Any additional leave = annual leave or unpaid leave
Carer's Leave (Paid)	Emergency care for a dependant when arrangements break down.	ASAP	Paid	1 day per occasion, max 2 per 12 months.
Carer's Leave (Unpaid)	Care for dependant with long-term illness, disability, or age-related needs.	3 days notice for 0.5–1 day; otherwise notice = 2× length of leave.	Unpaid	Up to 1 week per 12 months.

Emergency Leave	Time off for unexpected emergencies (fire, flood, burglary).	Notify ASAP	Paid or unpaid at manager discretion.	Reasonable time, typically 1–2 days.
Additional Discretionary Leave	Exceptional personal, family, or compassionate circumstances not covered elsewhere.	In advance where possible; ASAP in emergencies.	Paid or unpaid depending on case.	No fixed entitlement.

Study Leave	Time off for approved training related to current role.	Through training form.	Paid (if course approved).	Based on course requirements
Jury Service / Witness Service	Mandatory court attendance.	As much notice as possible; provide summons	Paid, minus court loss-of-earnings reimbursement.	Length of jury service. Manager may request deferment only if service impact is severe.
Public / Civic Duties	Duties such as magistrate, school governor, etc.	As required.	Unpaid unless annual leave used	Flexible.
Armed Forces Duties	Reserve training or deployment.	As required by MOD.	Unpaid unless annual leave used.	Depends on duty.
Medical / Dental Appointments	Time off for personal health appointments.	Advance notice where possible.	Unpaid unless annual leave used.	Appointment duration.
Religious / Cultural Observance	Time off for religious festivals or cultural obligations	Advance notice where possible.	Unpaid unless annual leave used.	Flexible.