



Time off for public duties

Submission to the Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The not-for-profit organisation champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years.

It has 160,000 members across all sectors and sizes of organisation and provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Public policy at the CIPD draws on our extensive research and thought leadership, practical advice and guidance, along with the experience and expertise of our diverse membership, to inform and shape debate, government policy and legislation for the benefit of employees and employers. It also seeks to promote and improve best practice in people management and development and to represent the interests of our members.

Why the CIPD is responding

The CIPD recognises the value of employees taking reasonable time off to carry out public duties. Roles such as local councillor, school governor, tribunal member or magistrate can help employees develop useful skills and experience that improve their performance at work. Supporting employees to undertake public duties in their local community can also strengthen an employer's local brand and enhance its environmental or social impact.

However, employers also need to consider the effect of such absences on workplace operations and productivity. Although public duties can support an employee's development and performance, excessive time away from work can create challenges. HR professionals therefore play an important role in assessing what is reasonable for both the organisation and the employee requesting time off.

In August 2026, we polled CIPD members on this issue and received 134 responses. Of these, 21 had asked their current employer for time off to carry out public duties. Requests were more common among members in higher membership grades, such as Chartered Member and Chartered Fellow, who are also more likely to hold senior roles within their organisation. However, given the small sample size, these findings should be seen as indicative rather than conclusive.

The most common request was for time off to serve as a school governor, cited by 11 respondents, followed by trade union activities, cited by 5. Of the 21 respondents who had requested time off, 18 said their request had been accepted and 3 said it had been refused. None of those whose request was refused reported receiving a reason from their organisation.

Our response

Question 19: Do you have any further comments you would like to share on how the existing entitlement to time off works in practice?

In the CIPD's experience, larger employers are much more likely to have a formal internal policy and guidance to support line managers when assessing requests. This reflects the fact that larger organisations are more likely to employ HR professionals who can develop this support. By contrast, small and medium-sized firms tend to consider requests on a case-by-case basis.

Employers' main concerns about time off for public duties relate to productivity and organisational performance. It can be harder to release key or front-line workers, although some employers may be able to manage requests through flexible working. Absence can have a particularly significant impact on micro and small employers. There is also a reputational risk if an employee says something while carrying out their public role that reflects poorly on their employer. For example, if an employee given time off to serve as a councillor posts something on social media, which attracts negative attention.



Despite these concerns, public duties can benefit employers. Employees in these roles can gain transferable skills and experience that add value at work. Supporting public duties in the local community can also enhance an employer's local reputation and environmental or social impact. Many roles provide governance experience, helping employees progress into director-level positions. Although outside the scope of this consultation, we found that 25% of employers with 250 or more employees offer some paid time off for military reserve activities for similar reasons. At a wider level, enabling employees to undertake public duties can strengthen the skills and experience of the labour force, with potential benefits for UK productivity and growth.

In terms of the time off work for public duties information on GOV.UK, we would reorder the flow of information so that it starts with who does and doesn't qualify before tackling what is reasonable and disputes. We would also like the guidance to state clearly that reasonable time off may include time away from work for training and development required for the public role.

Question 20: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following roles should be added to the list of public duties eligible for time off work?

- ***Special constables***
- ***Governors for academies and academy trusts***
- ***Members of a Conservation Board***
- ***Members of a Corporate Joint Committee***
- ***Audit committee members of a designated institution***
- ***Members of the governing body of a designated institution***
- ***Fee-paid judges***
- ***Members of an Integration Joint Board***
- ***Lay panel members of the Judicial Appointments Commission***

The CIPD agrees that these roles should be added to the list of public duties eligible for time off work. This is because this will help widen the pool of talent and help ensure that the people supporting our public bodies are more representative of their local communities.

Question 21: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following roles should be removed from the list of public duties eligible for time off work?

- ***Board members of the Environment Agency and Scottish Environment Protection Agency***
- ***Members of the General Teaching Council for Wales (now known as the Education Workforce Council)***
- ***Board members of national health bodies***
- ***Board members of Scottish Water***

The CIPD agrees that these roles should be removed from the list of public duties eligible for time off work because, as is highlighted in the consultation, these roles do not align with the original, locally focused intent of the legislation, nor does the evidence suggest that the time off is a crucial driver for those wishing to apply for these positions.