1. **Purpose**
The University Annual Leave Policy QA101 sets out the procedure and practice for availing of annual leave during normal circumstances. However, since the closure of the University due to the COVID-19 restrictions on 12 March early in our annual leave year, it is unlikely that our staff had availed of much annual leave. As an employer, it is our responsibility under the Organisation of Working Time Act to ensure that staff are able to avail of annual leave and that they are able to reconcile work and family responsibilities and have the opportunity for rest and recreation.

2. **Scope**
This policy applies to all employees of the University, including full-time, part-time, temporary or those on fixed-term contracts of employment. It also applies to workers such as agency staff, and casual staff. Annual leave will be applied on a pro-rata basis to staff working part-time.

3. **Taking Annual leave**
Given the ongoing changes to how we now do our work due to the restrictions, it is now more important that staff avail of annual leave to take a break from work. To ensure that our staff get appropriate rest and a break from their work during the summer period each line manager is to ensure that all staff in their area of responsibility avail of a minimum period of two weeks’ annual leave between the beginning of May and the end of September.

Where staff are looking for additional annual leave, managers should consider such requests and accommodate where they can.

Line Managers also have the discretion to approve annual leave outside of the above period subject to the needs of the particular area. Line Managers are also required to keep a record of all leave availed of.

4. **Christmas Closure Period 2020**
The University closure period for this Christmas period will now be revised. The University will now close on Friday 18 December and reopen on the 4 January. This will therefore mean that staff will be required to avail of 7 days’ annual leave. This will allow our staff to consider plans now for the Christmas period, and also ensure a rest period for staff after what will be a different and challenging period in terms of how we will be working in line with Government and Public Health guidelines.

5. **Annual leave carrying forward**
Whilst annual leave should be taken within the leave year (January to December), the Annual leave policy AQ101 does provide that annual leave of not more than five days can be carried forward with written approval by the Line Manager. It has been agreed that due to the current circumstances the number of days that can be carried forward will be increased to eight days, again with Line Manager approval. These days will need to be availed of in the first six months of the new leave year (January to December 2021).
6. **Responsibilities for Implementation**
Employees, Line Management, the Human Resources Office and the University share the responsibility to implement this policy.

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Appendix 1

FAQs

Q. Does an employee have to avail of the annual leave in one block?
A. No, whilst it would be ideal that an employee would take a two week break in one block to enable a good break from work, an employee can avail of annual leave in a manner agreed with the line manager. Some examples of this could be:
   a. A two-week block
   b. Two separate weeks over the period
   c. A one week block and a combination of days

Q. I have an employee who has flexi-leave, can they take the time worked up and approved prior to the University closure during this period?
A. Yes, by agreement with their line manager. The employee can take that leave during this period, in addition to the annual leave period.

Q. I do not have enough annual leave to avail of the seven days during the Christmas Closure, and avail of two weeks’ annual leave.
A. Where such a circumstance arises a discussion with HR should take place to see what options are available to the employee.

Q. I am working remotely, how do I apply for annual leave?
A. For staff who record their annual leave on CORE then they can continue to apply in the same way. Where there is an access issue then an email to the line manager should be sent, and receiving the necessary approval from the line manager. A record should be maintained for inputting. Where a staff member is not recording annual leave on CORE, an email to Line Manager/HOS/HOD should be sent setting out the dates of leave. The Line Manager/HOS/ HOD is expected to respond with the decision on the leave request in a timely manner (not later than one week).

Q. Due to changes to my work I am not able to avail of the two weeks’ annual leave between May and September. What are my options?
A. Availing of annual leave is important for staff and whilst changes to how work is being done is now different it is still important for staff to avail of leave during the summer period. Where there are work challenges these should be discussed with your Line Manager/HOS/ HOD to put in place some arrangement to avail of the annual leave and break during this period.

Q. I cannot travel this summer because of COVID-19 restrictions so I do not wish to avail of annual leave, what are my options?
A. Whilst many staff would have had plans for their summer holiday which are now no longer viable, i.e. overseas travel there is a still a need for staff to take a break, to rest and detach from work.

Q. Am I expected to be available to answer emails or my phone while availing of annual leave?
A. No staff member is expected to be available to their employer while taking annual leave. We would encourage staff to put their out of office on email, and a voice message on phones to inform colleagues that they are on annual leave until a particular date.
We would also encourage managers to note your employee dates of annual leave and avoid contacting them.