

Civil Servants to Take Bank Holidays on Religious Days of Their Choice

Civil servants will be able to take bank holidays on the religious days of their choice under moves to introduce "cultural flexitime".

Officials in the education department will be allowed to work from home on statutory days off and take the time owed to mark their own religious traditions. It means staff will be able to work at home on Christmas Day for the first time this year and swap it for a different religious festival such as Eid or Diwali.

The pioneering arrangements also apply to cultural traditions, meaning a Welsh employee could move a bank holiday to St David's Day. Staff could also choose to mark St George's Day on April 23.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families, is the first Government department to adopt the policy intended to accommodate the different religions practised among its staff, but others are likely to follow suit.

Some public bodies and firms already offer similar arrangements, such as allowing Christian holidays to be exchanged for festivals from other religions. The DCSF scheme affects 2,600 civil servants working in London, Darlington, Runcorn and Sheffield.

Staff will be able to switch all eight statutory days off, including Christmas, Easter and secular bank holidays. For example, Sikhs could choose to take days that mark the birth of the prophet teachers, or, along with Hindus, celebrate Diwali in the autumn. Muslims could mark Eid-ul-Adha and Ramadan while Jews would be free to take time off at Yom Kippur or Hanukkah.

Staff choosing to swap bank holidays for other key dates will not be required to prove that they follow a different faith.

A DCSF spokesman said 10 per cent of the department's staff are from ethnic minorities, a greater proportion than the national average. He said: "Our new cultural flexitime arrangements have been welcomed by staff - they asked for it.

"As a progressive department, we are more than pleased to meet the request, as we believe it's both good for employees and the business.

"Staff who use this flexibility gain no advantage, in time or cost, over other staff who take UK bank holidays, except to have the flexibility to take time off that is more appropriate to them and their cultural beliefs.

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