Managing Annual Leave Requests and Holiday Clashes

Holiday clashes are common in organisations with minimum staffing levels, busy periods and multiple workplaces. A clear approval process can balance business cover with workers' statutory entitlement, while preventing disputes about who requested a date first.

1. Set the rules before the busy period

Publish the leave year, booking process, approval responsibility, reasonable notice requirements and any transparent restrictions for essential coverage. Staff should know that a request is not approved until it has been confirmed. Apply rules consistently and consider exceptional circumstances fairly.

2. Check legal notice and entitlement

Unless a relevant agreement says otherwise, a worker usually gives notice of at least twice the duration of the holiday requested. An employer refusing or cancelling booked leave must usually give notice at least equal to the period of leave affected. Employers must still provide a genuine opportunity to take the statutory holiday entitlement.

Situation	Fair response
Two people request the same dates	Check staffing requirements, existing approvals and the published allocation method.
A late request follows a family emergency	Consider the individual circumstances and available cover rather than applying a rule mechanically.
A manager needs to cancel approved leave	Check notice rules, contract, alternatives and any significant impact on the worker.
An employee has unused leave near year-end	Review leave opportunities and relevant carry-over rights rather than allowing avoidable loss.

3. Make the decision traceable

Keep the date of each request, requested period, entitlement available, decision, reason and any revised dates. Where requests cannot all be approved, document the objective operational reasons and alternatives offered. Do not treat discretionary restrictions as a way to prevent statutory leave.

Example A | Two employees request the same week

A site needs four staff each weekday but approving both requests would leave only three. One request was approved earlier; the second is pending.

Employer response: Honour the approval, check available cover and offer alternative dates for the second request. Document the cover assessment and communicate promptly.

4. Watch for changing work patterns

A worker changing contractual hours or moving into an irregular-hours arrangement may need their available entitlement assessed differently. Do not use a blanket days-based balance where the relevant entitlement is being tracked in hours.

How Assyst helps employers manage holiday requests

Assyst receives holiday requests electronically through the staff app, recording the date and time each request is submitted. The approval process also records when a manager makes a decision, and employees receive confirmation in their app when leave is approved. Before approving, managers can see other holidays already booked for the same week or period, identify potential clashes and consider staffing cover. Managers can add notes to individual requests; these remain linked to the relevant holiday absence for future reference. Assyst also links holiday decisions with each worker's entitlement, working pattern and leave record.

Discuss your workforce requirements with Assyst

Assyst Workforce Management is a workforce management platform for multi-site employers, bringing together HR and paperless onboarding, time and attendance, workforce scheduling, payroll calculations, task management and a mobile staff app. To find out more or discuss how Assyst could support your business, visit www.assyst.uk and contact us through the website.

Useful official sources

Acas — Asking for and taking holiday
https://www.acas.org.uk/checking-holiday-entitlement/asking-for-and-taking-holiday

GOV.UK — Holiday entitlement rights
https://www.gov.uk/holiday-entitlement-rights

GOV.UK — Calculate leave entitlement
https://www.gov.uk/holiday-entitlement-rights/calculate-leave-entitlement

General guidance for employers in Great Britain, reviewed November 2026. Contract terms and individual circumstances may require professional advice.