

Workplace adjustments for Jewish officers and staff

Guidance about supporting Jewish colleagues from the Jewish Police Association.

First published 23 September 2022

This guide has been developed to provide information for leaders and others in the police service on how they can support Jewish officers and staff.

These recommendations will support policing to continue to be an open and inclusive organisation. They will help to positively shape recruitment, retention and progression, and will assist the service to improve the quality of working experience for Jewish colleagues.

Shabbat or Sabbath

Sabbath – referred to in Hebrew as Shabbat – is a holy day in Judaism. In the Book of Genesis, God rested on the seventh day of creation. To commemorate this, Shabbat is the Jewish day of rest. Observing Shabbat involves refraining from various acts of work. Shabbat starts about one hour before dusk on Friday afternoon and lasts for approximately 25 hours, until after dark the following day.

As in other religions, there are many different denominations within Judaism, which can result in a variety of personal beliefs and practices. Observant Orthodox Jews generally take the ban of not working on the Jewish Sabbath very strictly and refrain from activities such as travelling, writing, using electric switches and making phone calls. Instead, they will be in synagogue for prayer and study. This would obviously mean that they could not fulfil policing duties on the Sabbath.

Other Jews would be less strict in defining what is and is not permitted on the Sabbath, and some might feel able to perform police duties. The act of saving life is always considered an exemption, but this will end when an officer's role to save life is over.

A similar diversity of practice arises over Jewish festivals, for which some Jews will feel they have to be in synagogue, while others will observe them in different ways and may be willing to carry on their police work.

How strictly a Jew observes the Sabbath, as well as the other rules described in this guidance, is not a matter of flexibility.

Some roles within the police service require set working hours. For example, rotating shift patterns or working as part of specialist units can make a stricter interpretation of observing Shabbat difficult for Jewish colleagues.

Those with stricter observance will need to leave work in sufficient time to start Shabbat. This will vary depending on date and location. A calendar of times can be provided to managers and there are many online resources about Shabbat timings.

Recommendations

- Consider flexible working. This will support Jewish colleagues who do not work on Shabbat by allowing them to adjust their working hours on a Friday and Saturday, or their rest days appropriately, and compensating during the rest of the week. The [**Jewish Police Association \(JPA\)**](#) can provide you with further guidance on adapting shift patterns and other creative solutions to support Jewish colleagues. This is based on the experiences of numerous members who have agreed flexible working arrangements for the purpose of Shabbat observance in multiple forces across multiple roles.
- In the event that an officer with a flexible working arrangement is still on duty unexpectedly when Shabbat starts, provide accommodations around uniform and equipment.
 - Make provision for any equipment (including warrant card and other personal possessions) to be stored securely without the officer having to do an act of work, for collection after Shabbat.
 - Support other arrangements made in advance around food and clothes so that the officer does not have to work into Shabbat. For example, if the situation requires, bring an on-duty Jewish officer a change of clothing so they do not need to walk home in uniform.
- Be mindful that Jewish officers will have to plan their day on a Friday carefully to ensure they have completed reports or notes of arrests, for example, and can finish work in good time.

Festivals

There are several festivals in the Jewish calendar. Jews from orthodox communities may observe 13 festival days, while others may observe seven to eight days. Like Shabbat, Jewish festivals also

begin before dusk and continue until shortly after sunset, either one or two days later. A full list of Jewish festivals can be found on [the JPA website](#).

The Jewish laws governing work on festivals are almost indistinguishable from those concerning Shabbat. Similar prohibitions and restrictions apply. This means that Jewish colleagues may have to leave work early on the day before a festival. Festivals should fit easily into an employee's annual leave requirement. They can also be taken as substituted public holidays (for constables and sergeants, in accordance with Police Regulations) or unpaid leave.

If leave is required, Jewish colleagues should give line managers as much notice as possible, to limit clashes with others' requests.

Managing time off for religious observance, in particular for festivals, may occasionally cause a problem in police service roles where it is expected that annual leave will be taken at certain periods of the year, or at times when annual leave is restricted. There are practical solutions that can be used to solve this.

Recommendations

- Consider the recommendations to support inclusion made under the Shabbat section.
- Discuss accommodations to support festival observance as far in advance ahead as possible. Jewish festival dates are calculated based on the lunar calendar and can be advised many years in advance.
- Consider carefully what impact this will have on training requirements. Make reasonable adjustments, both in terms of initial recruitment and as careers progress.
- Discuss the manner in which the work to be carried out can be varied if necessary. Support a request to have a Police Federation or trade union representative attend the discussion. The JPA can also assist to help everyone arrive at a solution that works with minimal or no disruption. The JPA has particular experience in this area, in terms of what has worked already in various roles. Any agreements should be formalised and put into writing for future arrangements.

Prayer

Some Jews will pray three times a day. Prayer times are:

- in the morning (usually before normal working hours)

- in the afternoon (often during lunchtime, or early evening in the summer months)
- in the evening (after nightfall)

Some individuals, in particular observant men, may wish to attend prayers with a quorum (minyan is the Hebrew word for a quorum of ten adult men, following the Orthodox tradition). This can also apply if someone is in mourning. There are Jewish prayers specific to mourning that can only be recited when praying with a quorum.

Recommendations

- Provide a quiet room or designated place for prayer.
- Consider releasing staff for short breaks outside of normal rest breaks to allow for prayer.
- Note that a Jewish colleague may need to attend prayers before and after working hours.
- Note that a Jewish colleague who wishes to pray with a quorum may need to attend services at around lunchtime. If they do not have standard working hours, then the timings of other services may need to be taken into consideration.

Appearance and contact

Some Jewish people may have specific dress requirements.

Some Jewish men and women cover their heads at all times with a skullcap (also known as a yarmulka, kappel or kippah). Some Jewish women refrain from wearing trousers, short skirts or short sleeves. Some married Jewish women will cover their hair with a scarf, hat or wig (sheital).

Some Jewish people will not want to be in a state of undress or have physical contact with members of the opposite sex. For some strictly orthodox individuals, this may also extend to shaking hands. If in doubt, it might be better to wait to see if an individual offers their hand before offering yours. If you are unsure, it is fine to ask.

Recommendations

- Accommodate articles of faith such as the kippah (black or navy in colour) or the sheital (natural colours) into uniform policy when health and safety allows.
- There are laws in Judaism that prohibit wearing fabric that is a mixture of wool and linen. These are known as shatnez. If uniforms are made of wool and linen, shatnez special arrangements for alternative uniforms can be made.

Food

Judaism also affects the type of food one is permitted to eat (known as kosher food). However, this varies considerably according to which Jewish denomination one belongs. Some Jews are restricted to a particular diet, while others eat general food freely.

The laws governing production of kosher food are complex, and include restrictions on what types of meat and fish can be eaten, which combinations of foods may be eaten together and how foods are prepared. Jews who observe the dietary laws may require all purchased processed food to be certified by a Kashrut authority.

In advance of any catered commitments, Jewish colleagues should check whether arrangements can be made to accommodate their needs.

Recommendations

- Provide facilities for Jewish colleagues to store and heat kosher food separately.
- Discuss individual requirements with Jewish colleagues.
- Note that caterers without kosher supervision will not be able to make their own kosher or kosher-style foods. Halal food cannot be substituted for kosher food.

Bereavement

When a Jew dies, the funeral must take place as soon as possible following the death, sometimes even on the actual day of the death. Jewish colleagues may therefore need to attend a funeral at short notice. Delays to burial do sometimes occur but these often cause tremendous distress for the family of the deceased.

After the funeral, the immediate family of the deceased mourn for seven days. This is known as the Shiva. During the Shiva, the immediate family stay at home, saying prayers and receiving condolences from well-wishers. Colleagues who wish to offer condolences, including non-Jewish colleagues, may also wish to attend the funeral or Shiva.

Prayers for the deceased are recited for 12 months following the death of a parent, and for 30 days following the death of a child, sibling or spouse.

Recommendations

- Treat attendance at a funeral and the Shiva as compassionate leave or as leave because of the death of a dependant.
- Consider contact with the JPA. One of the many roles that the JPA serves is helping officers who are facing bereavement and giving them pastoral and religious support, as well as assistance in practical matters. The JPA will also assist the family and force of an officer who dies, including helping with funeral arrangements, providing a chaplain and giving ongoing support.
- Accommodate Shloshim. For 30 days following a death, some Jewish men do not shave or cut their hair, which means they may come to work in an unshaven state. This is known as Shloshim and supervisors should accommodate this whenever possible.
- Consider the needs of Jewish colleagues, as they may wish to arrange their working hours to accommodate communal prayers.

How the JPA can help

Recruitment

Forces are encouraged to direct Jewish applicants to the JPA for advice and support.

The JPA can share information on how religious requirements are accommodated, including facilitating discussion of roles and religious observance with existing Jewish police officers or staff.

This will allow candidates to learn what the service is doing to promote inclusion and will provide them with an opportunity to ask questions about a potential career with the service.

Retention

The JPA can assist forces with further advice and information on promoting inclusion and how to support Jewish colleagues effectively.

The JPA can also support Jewish colleagues in making appropriate arrangements with their force. Colleagues who wish to become more observant or to convert to Judaism will have new support needs.

Forces are encouraged to take the necessary measures to support religious requirements wherever possible, to meet their requirements under the Equality Act and to promote inclusion and colleague

welfare. The JPA are ready to help forces with guidance if needed.

This guidance is developed with support from the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

The Board of Deputies is the democratically elected, cross-communal, representative body in the Jewish community. It comprises over 300 deputies directly elected by the synagogues and communal organisations they represent, from congregations to youth movements, and social welfare charities to regional councils.

Further employer's guidance is available on the [Board of Deputies of British Jews website](#).

Download as a PDF

- [Workplace adjustments for Jewish officers and staff \(pdf\) 1.88 MB](#)

Tags

Diversity and inclusion Equality