

No. 340/24

21st October 2024

Dear Colleagues,

RMG/CWU Business Recovery, Transformation & Growth Agreement Appendix 1 Seasonal Variation - Updated FAQs

Branches and Representatives will recall LTB 213/23 (Letter To Branches) concerning the commitments against Appendix 1 - Seasonal Variation of the BRT&G (Business Recovery, Transformation & Growth) Agreement, as well as the joint FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) document linked to its national rollout.

Since then, we have continued to review the application of Seasonal Variation with Royal Mail and as part of this, we have further agreed on the need to review and refresh this FAQ document.

Accordingly, please find attached a revised FAQs document, the bulk of which reflects former listed Questions and Answers issued in LTB 213/23. However, to assist, listed below are the key changes now set out in this updated version:

- Q&A 7: This confirms more local flexibility to move duties 'out of scope' from Seasonal Variation.
- Q&A 7/9: This confirms that new requests by individuals to be exempted from Seasonal Variation now need to be made via a Flexible Working application.
- Q&A 16: Confirms the application of Seasonal Variation against Network Window changes.
- Q&A 18: Updated confirmation of the application of Seasonal Variation against Annual Leave.
- Q&A 19: Updated confirmation of the application of Seasonal Variation in terms of Sick Leave pay (in line with the Joint Statement, section 6.4.1 BRT&G Agreement on Sick Pay - set out in LTB 056/24, issued 6th February).
- Q&A 25: Updates that a formal Hours Reconciliation process has been established for employees that leave part way through the Seasonal Variation cycle (i.e. the process to correct any imbalance in hours either owed to Royal Mail or the individual at the point of leaving).
- Q&A 37: Updated confirmation of the application of Seasonal Variation in terms of Job Share arrangements and more local flexibility to move such duties 'out of scope' from Seasonal Variation.
- Q&A 43: Confirms the application of Seasonal Variation will not impact Pension arrangements.
- Q&A 44: Updated confirmation of the application of Seasonal Variation in terms of Bank Holiday arrangements.
- Q&A 45: Confirms the application of Seasonal Variation in terms of individuals on Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Leave.
- Q&A 46: Confirms the application of Seasonal Variation in terms of the Working Time Directive.
- Q&A 47: Confirms the arrangements where an individual has been incorrectly recorded in PSP against Seasonal Variation.

Additionally, listed from 48 to 53 are several functional Q&As, which are designed to offer further clarification in terms of the local application of Seasonal Variation and we feel their inclusion within the FAQs will assist in this regard and with local level enquiries etc.

Finally, it can be confirmed that this FAQ document will also be issued by Royal Mail to operational managers via 'signpost' to ensure consistency of approach.

In relation to the application of Seasonal Variation for 2025/26 calendar year, we have requested that discussions take place with the business in line with the previous joint statements to review the lessons learned and agree the appropriate reference points. Further communications regarding this will be issued in due course.

Any enquiries to the content of this LTB should be directed to the Outdoor Department, email address: Pharacz@cwu.org.

Yours sincerely,

Tony Bouch
Assistant Secretary

Royal Mail & CWU Joint National FAQs for Seasonal Variation (Version 3, 27/09/2024)

Ref	Question	Answer
1	What is Seasonal Variation?	Seasonal Variation is a change in your planned hours of attendance across the seasons to allow better alignment to workload, whilst weekly paid hours remain constant (excluding any OT worked).
2	Why do we need it?	By better aligning staff hours to workload, it should help to achieve productivity in the Low Seasons when we traditionally struggle to do so. It is also designed to look at the problem with Summer lapsing, which we know is difficult and often unpopular.
3	Has Seasonal Variation been agreed with the CWU?	Yes. Seasonal Variation is part of the RMG and CWU Business Recovery, Transformation and Growth Agreement.
4	What is the Seasonal Variation Model?	OPGs contracted to work 35 hours or more per week will vary up and down as Full Timers: 24 minutes per day. Part Timers will vary up and down 10 minutes per day. Part Timers that attend on a Full Time (FT) daily attendance (for example, they perform a job share or compressed days) will flex 24 mins per day. These guidelines will equally apply to recent joiners to the business
5	How does the variation work in High and Low Seasons?	The agreed arrangements and design are set out below by Season: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In High Season(s), 24mins/10mins per FT / PT will be worked at beginning of attendance • In Low Season(s), FT OPGs will start 14mins later and finish 10mins earlier, with PT OPGs finishing 10mins earlier • Part Timers that attend on a Full Time (FT) daily attendance (for example, they perform a job share or compressed days) will flex 24 mins per day.
6	Is Seasonal Variation operating across all RMG?	Seasonal Variation was deployed just into the Delivery function, because this is the area of the business where we traditionally struggle most to achieve our productivity targets in the Low workload months.
7	Is Seasonal Variation used across the whole Delivery Office?	Seasonal Variation will be deployed throughout most DOs, with the exception of a limited number of non-outdoor delivery duties, e.g., admin, CSS, collections. Some employees may also be exempted from the design due to personal reasons which prevent them from varying their attendances in line with the national design. Some units may be removed from scope because Seasonal Variation will simply not work there (eg: the mail cannot be advanced to meet the earlier start time of employees in the High season. Where exemptions are made, the relevant authorisation must be attained, and the business tools and systems updated to reflect the situation.

Ref	Question	Answer
		<p>Additionally, DOs can review the option to remove particular duties from the Seasonal Variation design locally by agreement and where it makes sense to do so, this can include Firms duties, (DPRs) Dedicated Parcel Routes and Hybrid duties.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Role Exemption – COM can enact independently 2. Personal Exemption - COM can enact independently 3. Unit Exemption – ROD authorisation required <p>Any new request by an individual to be exempted from Seasonal Variation should be made as BAU (Business As Usual) in line with Flexible working requests. Guidance for COMs on how to update PSP/SISO can be found on Seasonal Variation SharePoint Site.)</p>
8	When are the Summer and Autumn Seasons?	<p>In year 1, the High Season ran from week 24 (4th September 2023) to week 38 (17th December 2023). 15 weeks</p> <p>There was a Low Season from week 44 (22nd January 2024) to Week 52 (24th March 2024). 9 weeks.</p> <p>The next low period will run from week 12 (17th June 2024) to Week 22 (1st September 2024). 11 weeks</p> <p>There will be a High Season (18th November to 22nd December or 25th November to 29th December. 5 weeks.</p> <p>The remainder of the weeks will be run at mid season hours (contracted hours).</p> <p>Year 1 & 2 will be reviewed jointly between RMG and the CWU to consider adaptations for 2025/26 and beyond.</p>
9	What if OPGs can't work to the new seasonal hours, for example because of commitments outside of work?	<p>If employees have concerns relating to their ability to adjust their hours seasonally they should discuss with their COM / and CWU Rep. Any new request by an individual to be exempted from Seasonal Variation should be made in line with Flexible working requests.</p>
10	How does Seasonal Variation affect Rurals and Waysiders?	<p>As per the rest of your colleagues, their attendance patterns will mirror those under Seasonal Variation.</p>
11	I take part of my meal relief at the end of my duty – how does this affect me?	<p>OPGs can continue to take part of their meal relief at the end of their duty in line with local arrangements.</p>
12	I share a route with a partner, will their times also alter?	<p>There will be no change to finishing times under Seasonal Variation, apart from in Low when people will finish 10 minutes earlier. This will apply to all FT and PT OPGs. This will ensure that shared van partners, under Seasonal Variation, remain synced in terms of their working patterns. However, if a shared van partner has an Exception this will need to be reviewed locally to ensure delivery arrangements remain synced.</p>

Ref	Question	Answer
13	Will Seasonal Variation affect the parcel collect and COLOD (Collection on delivery) elements of work / customer opening & closing times?	No. Nothing will change in relation to parcel collect or COLOD or CSP Opening times.
14	How are reserves impacted?	Reserve's hours will adjust seasonally too. The only exception is if they cover a duty that is 'exempt' from Seasonal Variation, in which case they will be able to either continue to vary their hours or work in line with the times of the seasonally exempt duty. Where this happens, it should be discussed between the OPG, COM and Rep/Rep. The difference in hours up or down can be claimed via overtime or by working the time.
15	Will the Seasonal Variation approach (24 mins FT / 10 mins per day PT) apply equally to all rotational patterns?	Yes.
16	How do Seasonal Variation and Network Window changes interact with each other?	Seasonal Variation will simply be overlaid to any duty changes resulting from a Network Window changes to start and finish times, including any Seasonal Variation exemptions. This will equally be the case in terms of any changes resulting from the Network Window Post Implementation Reviews (PIRs).
17	How does Seasonal Variation and Revision activity interact with each other?	Seasonal Variation will simply be overlaid to any duty changes agreed locally and resulting from a revision.
18	How will annual leave work?	<p>From the start of the 2024/25 annual leave year (April 2024), annual leave balances will be deducted at the prevailing season daily rate (i.e. more hours deducted per day's leave in the High season and less hours will be deducted in the Low season)</p> <p>In the 2024/25 annual leave year, as there have been recent changes to the initial Seasonal Variation design there are a small number of weeks in which the HR PSP system (which records leave) is now not aligned with the new Seasonal Variation calendar. Managers do not need to take action in PSP to correct this issue. Instead, HR Services will run an exercise to ensure all employees' who take leave in the impacted weeks have their leave balances corrected and updated in the PSP system. As a result of this, no one will lose any leave balance and employees will be able to book annual leave as normal. Details on these HR Services corrections have already been communicated.</p>
19	Are there any changes to calculation of Sick Leave and ROSP with Seasonal Variation?	<p>Sick absence will continue to be recorded in instances / days.</p> <p>ROSP (Reduced Occupational Sick Pay) is calculated based on a 37 hour week. Therefore, if you are absent during the summer (35 hours) or winter (39 hours) periods, your pay may differ marginally. You may be slightly better off for periods of absence incurred during the winter because the number of hours paid at the higher normal company sick pay rate offsets the hours paid as ROSP to a greater extent than in the summer. The opposite applies to absences in the summer.</p>

Ref	Question	Answer
20	If on some days an OPG can't work the seasonal hours, what happens?	In this instance there should be a discussion between OPG and COM, and CWU rep where necessary, to discuss options, as would happen for ad hoc later starts or earlier finishes due to personal issues/commitments/Hospital Appointments.
21	Will lapsing continue in the unit?	One clear aim of Seasonal Variation is to reduce the need to lapse as attendance patterns in Low periods will reduce and in High periods the extra time should reflect the increase in workload. The Summer 2023 pilot has helped to inform understanding on this matter and it will remain under ongoing review by both Royal Mail and the CWU resulting in recent Joint Communications altering Duration and timings of Low and High Seasons. Again, if there are any outstanding local points these should be raised via the normal channels and where necessary with Royal Mail and the CWU nationally to assist.
22	Will this impact on WTLL sessions?	No. You OPGs should still receive 30mins WTLL per week.
23	Will there still be Overtime within the DO?	Inevitably, overtime will still be needed and will continue in line with local arrangements but will apply against the Seasonal Variation patterns.
24	Will my Meal Relief times change?	Meal Reliefs will continue to reflect the principles set out in the Way Forward Agreement. So, if daily attendance times cross over into a new threshold for Meal Relief (plus or minus) as a result of the Seasonal Variation, people will need to take the Meal Relief entitlement for the new threshold. If for instance a person currently work 6 hours 55 minutes on a Tuesday, in the high season then the Meal Relief will increase (in line with the longer attendance) to 40mins. Conversely, those working 7 hours 10 minutes on a Tuesday currently will see their daily attendance reduce under 7 hours in the Low Season, which will reduce the Meal Relief 30mins.
25	What happens if people join or leave the business part way through the Seasonal Variation cycle?	Because Seasonal Variation varies the hours worked in High and Low Seasons, it may be the case if employees leave the business that their Scheduled hours and Paid hours do not balance at that point in time. It could either be the case that they owe the business time, or the business owes them time. An Hours Reconciliation process has been established to ensure that Scheduled and Paid hours balance, much-like the existing process of balancing annual leave when people leave the business. (Details can be found in the Seasonal Variation Employee Guide.)
26	If people buy down or reduce hours from FT (or 35 hours) to PT part way through the year, after working the High Season, how will they be reimbursed for the time owed?	Managers will perform a calculation to assess what time is owed to the employee, and this should be given back via additional leave. Where there are any concerns with this they should be raised with your COM and you can also seek assistance from your CWU Rep.
27	What happens if people change their contracted hours part way through the Seasonal Variation cycle?	If people increase their PT hours, then there will be no change to their Seasonal Hours as they will continue to vary by 10 mins. If they go from PT to FT (or have an uplift to 35 hours) then they will increase this to 24 mins per attendance. If they change from FT to PT then they will decrease this to 10 mins per attendance. Where this happens, it will be reviewed locally and the difference in hours up or down can be claimed via overtime or by working the time.

Ref	Question	Answer
28	What happens if people change duties / roles part way through the year?	If people change duty during the Seasonal Variation cycle but their contract remains the same then there should be no change in attendance patterns. If they swap between a Seasonal duty and a non-seasonal duty, then they should adopt the hours of the non-seasonal duty. Where this happens, it will be reviewed locally and the difference in hours up or down can be claimed via overtime or by working the time.
29	Will Rest Day SAs need to be adjusted?	The rest day SAs need to be adjusted in line with seasonal variation, to ensure that the attendance is aligned with the working pattern of the office or van share partner. SAs will continue to require 30 days' notice by either party to cancel or adjust.
30	Will the seasonal Variation model (24 mins / 10 mins per day) apply equally to all days of the week?	Yes.
31	We have some OPGs on 35 hour contracts who are paid an additional 2hrs to bring them up to 37hrs. The 2 hours difference is paid by either overtime, SA, or a temporary hours increase (which is to be reviewed 6 monthly). How does Seasonal Variation work with these individuals?	<p>These OPGs will be expected to vary their hours up and down in line with the FT approach.</p> <p>If 2hrs difference is via temporary hours increase, then they will be paid 37hrs across the year, varying up to 24mins per attendance in High Season and down 24mins per attendance in Low Season (based on 5 day Attendance). Temporary Hours increase needs to be maintained.</p> <p>It will be the same for those that are paid the additional 2hrs via SA or OT, however this will need to continue to be paid as it is currently. The vary of 24mins up or down depending upon the season will be applied to the 35hrs and not to the SA or OT (which will remain as a 2hr block of time applied to the duty regardless of Season).</p>
32	How do people on new Terms and Conditions vary for seasonal variation?	The same as everyone else and will apply against whether FT or PT.
33	For PT staff who are made up to full timers over peak period will they be made up to 39 hours in line with the full timers?	Yes.
34	Will Seasonal Variation impact the two Bonuses paid at Christmas?	There will be no changes to the Christmas Bonus and Productivity Underpin payments due to seasonal variation. Full time OPG employees paid for 37 contractual hours each week will continue to receive 2x£100. Part time employees will have their payments calculated pro-rata as previously. Similarly, where a part time employee temporarily increases their contractual hours to full time for at least two-weeks of the four-week Christmas period, that would flow through to an increased Christmas Supplement payment as previously.

Ref	Question	Answer
35	What about the two bonuses paid at Christmas if part time OPG employees perform overtime/SA in December?	Again, there will be no change to previous arrangements. The Christmas Supplement of £100 will be paid pro-rated up to 37 hours based on contractual hours. The second separate payment of £100 (agreed back in June 2012 referred to as the Productivity Underpin payment) will again be paid pro-rated up to 37 hours based on contractual hours. However, as previously this second payment will be subject to a top up payment for part timers in January in accordance with any increase in hours worked via overtime/SA up to 37 hours.
36	Where a PT attends for FT hours on their days of attendance (eg: duty patterns where PT works FT hours on days of attendance) should they flex 10 or 24 mins per day?	Because these individuals effectively work full time hours on the days they attend, they should flex 24 minutes. However, as PSP will continue to class these individuals as PT local COMs will need to capture and record this variation locally and ensure any inaccurate leave deductions are captured locally and taken into account going forwards. In practice, this should be a one-off task annually. Where there are any concerns with this they should be raised with your COM and you can also seek assistance from your CWU Rep.
37	Does Seasonal Variation apply in the case of job share arrangements?	In the main, where a job share arrangements is based on effectively working full time hours on the days they attend, they should flex 24 minutes and 10 minutes if part time. This can be reviewed locally and the option to remove these particular duties from the Seasonal Variation design by agreement can take place where it makes sense to do so.
38	Will Seasonal Variation impact on overtime rates of pay?	No. Seasonal Variation does not vary Overtime rates.
39	Are Delivery Apprentices included in Seasonal Variation?	No. Delivery Apprentices are excluded from Seasonal Variation
40	Are Term Time Workers included in Seasonal variation or not?	No, they are excluded
41	Do PT workers who temporarily change to FT contracts in the peak period flex by 10 minutes or 24 minutes during their time as FT workers?	They will continue to flex 10 minutes per day to ensure that their planned hours balance over the annual cycle
42	For PT workers who temporarily change to FT contracts in the peak period, when are they eligible for overtime payments from?	The only change to current procedure is that Overtime is payable once your Seasonal hours have been exceeded, which for this population would take into account the 10min Seasonal Variation.

Ref	Question	Answer
43	Will seasonal Variation increase or decrease pension benefits?	Under the Seasonal Variation model, pay will remain constant through the year, so the value of pension benefits should, all other things being equal, not be affected. When employees leave the business, their hours will be assessed to establish whether an employee owes time or is owed time. Corrective action taken to address any imbalances at point of last day of service may result in an adjustment to total pay received. But, this will simply have the impact of trueing up the pension benefits accrued and therefore payable.
44	How will bank Holiday Credits Work?	Variation, the principles of Bank Holiday credits remain unchanged: Where a Bank/Public Holiday coincides with the employee's scheduled working day, they will receive a credit equal to the number of duty hours otherwise scheduled to be worked on the Bank/Public Holiday. This means the employee simply gets the day off, with no further adjustment required as the credit equals scheduled working time for the day (dependent upon which season the Bank/Public Holiday falls within). Where a Bank/Public Holiday coincides with an employee's scheduled rest day, they will receive an average attendance credit based upon the seasonalised scheduled working hours in that week (weekly scheduled working hours, divided by number of weekly conditioned attendances)
45	How does Seasonal Variation work for individuals on Maternity, Paternity or Adoption leave?	The Hours Reconciliation process will be used for these employees on return from Maternity, Paternity or Adoption leave. Where there are any concerns with this they should be raised with your COM and you can also seek assistance from your CWU Rep. The Hours Reconciliation process will not apply in the case of voluntary Career Breaks. Details can be found in the Seasonal Variation Employee Guide.
46	How does Seasonal Variation apply in terms of Working Time Directive?	Hour variations under Seasonal Variation will need to be accounted for under the Working Time Directive and individual hours worked in total.
47	What happens if an individual has been incorrectly recorded in PSP against Seasonal Variation?	Where it is highlighted that an individual has been incorrectly recorded in PSP against Seasonal Variation, this will be corrected locally and any imbalances made good. Where this is required the difference in hours up or down can be claimed via overtime or by working the time. Where there are any concerns with this they should be raised with your COM and you can also seek assistance from your CWU Rep.
Functional FAQs:		
48	I have got new starters in my office. How do I ensure that these people work seasonal varied hours	COMs will need to ensure 'new starters' are allocated onto a delivery work schedule within PSP. By default, in Deliveries, this work schedule will be 'seasonalised'. If an exception for Seasonal Variation is required then follow BAU process and

Ref	Question	Answer
	like their longer serving colleagues? Or how do I exclude them from seasonal variation if appropriate?	update PSP Work Schedule and SISO accordingly. Details on how to do this can be found SV Managers Guide.
49	What happens if people move from a Delivery Role to a Non Delivery Role eg processing and have a Seasonal Variation Exemption in Place?	When the ECR (transfer request) is submitted to move roles then the Seasonal Variation Exemption (in PSP) will cease as the new role is not covered by the design. People will not be 'owed' or 'owe' hours due to having an exemption.
50	What happens if people move from a Delivery Role to another Delivery Role eg move offices and have a Seasonal Variation Exemption in Place?	When the ECR (transfer request) is submitted to move roles then the Seasonal Variation Exemption (in PSP) will cease for the current office. The receiving manager in the new office will discuss whether the exemption is valid for the new role with the OPG, and where necessary a new request by an individual to be exempted from Seasonal Variation should be made in line with Flexible working requests.
51	Where are unit level individual exemptions recorded locally?	<p>There is a report under Work Schedule Management – Seasonal Working Exemptions that a manager can run which will detail all Employees within office that have current Seasonal Variation exemptions – Personal, Unit or Role related. Details on how to do this can be found SV Managers Guide.</p> <p>This information is to be retain in confidence as with all other such personal information.</p>
52	How can a local units amend how duties are recorded under the Seasonal Variation model (eg remove duties or include duties under the design)?	<p>Where there are changes locally this would need to be done at the start of the Financial Year as then there will be no/limited impact on the employee either being owed time or owing time to Royal Mail. There will also be no/limited impact on employees (within the Unit) Annual Leave either as it will be correct at the start of the Financial Year.</p> <p>To un/exempt a Unit:</p> <p>Ensure ROD Authorisation is obtained. Ensure other local stakeholders are informed.</p> <p>Within PSP, either add Exemption (Code 6 – Unit Exempt) to each employee or remove as applicable. Guidance can be found on how to do this within the SV Managers Guide</p> <p>Within SISO, for each employee either select Seasonal Variation exempt or unselect as applicable. Guidance can be found on how to do this within the SV Managers Guide</p>
53	Where is there further guidance on Seasonal Variation be found?	This can be found on Seasonal Variation SharePoint Site Seasonal Variation (royalmailgroup.com) or in Managers Guide which is also found on the SharePoint. If your query is not answered by these FAQs or in the Managers guide then please email seasonalworking@royalmail.com or alternatively raise your query with your CWU Rep or COM.

Ref	Question	Answer
		Any matters on the interaction of the above FAQ and wider Managers Guide should be raised normally to Royal Mail and the CWU nationally.