



University of
St Andrews

Career break

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Purpose	This policy has been developed to enable employees to request an extended period of unpaid time away from work in order to balance their career with other commitments, responsibilities and interests.

Version number	Purpose / changes	Document status	Author of changes, role and School or unit	Date
1.4	Broken link to application form fixed	Published	Lisa Stewart HR	11/11/2025

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- This document and forms associated with this document are available in an alternative format upon request.

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1. Statement

- 1.1 The University is committed to developing work practices and procedures that support work-life balance and personal development. As such, eligible employees can request to take a period of unpaid leave away from work for personal reasons, without disrupting their length of service. These requests are known as career breaks.
- 1.2 This procedure sets out the University's approach to career breaks and the basis on which they may be taken. It does not form part of the contract of employment and may be ended or amended at any time.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 There is no statutory provision for career breaks however the University recognises that there may be some circumstances where it may be beneficial to allow for employees to take a career break to focus on personal commitments. Reasons for a career break may include (but not limited to):
 - 2.1.1 To provide care for children/other dependants.
 - 2.1.2 To focus on personal study, training or development (which will usually be relevant to the employee's work at the University).
 - 2.1.3 Adapting to a new or changing disability or health condition.
 - 2.1.4 For any other purpose agreed with the University (e.g., overseas travel/voluntary/charity work).

3. Scope and eligibility

- 3.1 This policy applies to all employees who have at least two years' continuous service with the University by the start of the proposed career break. To be considered for a career break, employees must not have made another application for a career break in the previous 12-months. (Exceptional circumstances that do not meet these criteria may be considered).
- 3.2 Due to immigration regulations it may not be possible to agree to requests from employees who do not have indefinite leave to remain in the UK. Further information can be obtained from [HR immigration](#).
- 3.3 Academic employees wishing to take leave of absence for academic purposes, which are directly linked to their work, should refer to the policy: [University funded \(paid\) research and/or research impact leave for academic staff](#).

4. General principles

- 4.1 Career breaks will be considered on a case-by-case basis and in accordance with business need.
- 4.2 A career break will normally last between three months and two years. In exceptional cases, and where this is mutually agreed with the employee, line manager and Head of School/Unit, it may be possible for a career break to vary from these timelines.
- 4.3 Normally, requests to terminate a career break before the agreed end date will not be granted. This is primarily because temporary cover will usually have been agreed for the duration of the career break as initially agreed.
- 4.4 A career break request which lasts longer than an employee's length of service will not normally be approved.
- 4.5 Employees may request more than one career break while working at the University however, there will normally be at least five years between each career break request, and a separate application must be sought on each occasion. The total period of career breaks during an employee's career at the University should not normally exceed four years.
- 4.6 Employees must not commit themselves to plans prior to their application being formally approved.
- 4.7 The approval of a career break, the start date, and the duration of the break will be entirely at the line manager discretion in collaboration with the Head of School/Unit and the decision will be final (i.e. there is no right of appeal).
- 4.8 Employees must take all accrued annual leave before commencing a career break. There will normally be no payment in lieu of accrued but untaken annual leave.

5. Procedure to apply for a career break

5.1 Applying for a career break

- 5.1.1 The employee should complete a [career break application](#), providing reasonable advanced notice (at least 6-months) and submit this electronically to their line manager copying in the Head of School/Unit and their [HRBP](#). (It is recognised that there may be circumstances beyond the employee's control which prevents them from adhering to this timescale e.g., a sudden change in personal circumstances and line managers should consider requests accordingly).

- 5.1.2 **Note:** When the Head of School/Unit is the person making the application, approval must be sought via the Principal's Office.

5.2 Career break meeting

- 5.2.1 The line manager may arrange a meeting with the employee to discuss the request, particularly if anything is unclear, or if further details are required before a decision can be reached. The Head of School/Unit may also attend this meeting as they will be involved in deciding the outcome of the request.

5.3 Considering the request

- 5.3.1 In deciding whether to grant a career break, the line manager and Head of School/Unit will need to weigh up the potential benefits of the request against the potential adverse impacts/barriers that may arise due to the employee's absence. The decision on granting a career break application, will also consider the following factors (but not limited to):

- a. The period of absence requested.
- b. Eligibility to apply for a career break ([Section 3](#)).
- c. The purpose of the career break.
- d. Whether you have taken a career break in the previous 5-years and/or have exceeded the total period of career breaks (4-years) at the University.
- e. The operational and business needs of the School/Unit/University.
- f. The need to retain key skills, knowledge and experience within the School/Unit/ University.
- g. The ability to backfill the post during the career break, and the costs associated with this.

- 5.3.2 It will be the line manager's responsibility to verbally confirm the outcome to the employee. This will be done at the earliest opportunity however employees must be aware that the procedure for seeking relevant approval to arrange cover for leave may be time consuming.

- 5.3.3 If the request is **declined**: The line manager must confirm the outcome in writing to the employee (copying in the Head of School/Unit and [HRBP](#)) providing rationale for the decision. The

employee will be eligible to apply again after 12-months have elapsed from the date of the original application.

- 5.3.4 If the request is **approved**: Human Resources will confirm the terms and conditions of the career break in writing and the employee will be required to acknowledge (usually electronically) that they understand and agree to the terms during the career break.

6. Terms and conditions during a career break

- 6.1 All career breaks will be unpaid. While on a career break, the employee will not be entitled to:
- 6.1.1 Enhanced/occupational sick pay
 - 6.1.2 Accrue, take or be paid for annual or statutory leave
 - 6.1.3 Take enhanced/occupational family leave/pay¹
 - 6.1.4 Incremental progression payments (Refer to 6.3)
 - 6.1.5 Be considered for research leave
- 6.2 A career break will not be regarded as a break in service for the purpose of statutory employment provisions. However, the period of the career break will not count towards any service-related benefits (as listed in 6.1). For these purposes, service before the career break will be aggregated with service following the career break.
- 6.3 If incremental progression applies, the progression will be suspended for the duration of the career break. Annual salary on return will be at the same grade and point as when the career break commenced, adjusted to reflect any cost-of-living increases awarded during the period of absence if these apply.
- 6.4 Employee and employer pension contributions will cease during a career break (for USS and S&LAS). The career break period will not count as pensionable service. On return from the career break, there will be provision to make AVC (Additional Voluntary Contribution) payments into either pension scheme. For pension queries related to individual circumstances, please contact the [Pensions Administrator](#).

¹ Statutory entitlement (e.g., Statutory Maternity Pay) may also be affected since these are calculated on the basis of employee's salary in the weeks before the Expected Week of Childbirth (or "matching week" for adoption). Please contact an [HRBP](#) for specific guidance or advice on a particular situation.

7. During the career break

7.1 Conflict of interest

- 7.1.1 Career break leave should be used exclusively for the purpose for which it has been granted and must not be used to undertake any other paid employment unless permission has been given from the University in line with the [Declaration of Interests Policy](#). All provisions in the employment contract relating to confidential information and duties of fidelity will continue to apply.
- 7.1.2 Employees may wish to establish with the Social Security Agency whether they are entitled to any social security benefits and to check the position regarding National Insurance contributions.

7.2 Communication

- 7.2.1 Prior to commencing the career break, employees must ensure that [HR Self-Service](#) is up to date with accurate contact details so that the line manager can make contact if required. (If HR Self-Service is not used, the employee must ensure that they provide their line manager with contact details).
- 7.2.2 It is encouraged that the employee and line manager maintain reasonable contact during the career break to allow the line manager to keep the employee informed of any significant workplace developments which may be relevant to their employment. It is recommended that the employee and line manager discuss the amount of contact, how they wish to be contacted and the reason for contact in advance of the career break commencing.
- 7.2.3 An employee who is on a career break may be expected to keep up to date with significant developments in their field of work and to maintain professional links.

7.3 Contact days

- 7.3.1 On mutual agreement between the employee and the line manager, the employee may attend work during their career break leave without it impacting/ending their career break. These working days can be used for undertaking normal contractual duties or for other work requirements such as, attendance at a scheduled conference or to attend a training course. Employees are not obliged to accept a request to work and should not be penalised for refusing to do so; nor is the line manager obliged to offer any work to an employee during a career break.

- 7.3.2 Employees will receive payment at their normal rate of pay (applicable prior to the start of the career break) or the appropriate rate for the work undertaken. Any period of paid work during a career break will not count towards service-related benefits. Line managers are responsible for completing and returning the [contact days form](#) and submitting this to [Pay and Pensions](#) in order that any necessary salary payments can be made.

7.4 Recruitment/vacancies

- 7.4.1 Employees who are on a career break are entitled to apply for vacancies within the University however, if any application is successful, their career break will not necessarily be transferred to the new position, and the employee may be required to terminate their career break early to commence the new post.
- 7.4.2 Academic, Research and Teaching staff on a career break are not eligible to apply for promotion whilst on a career break but may apply in accordance with usual procedures upon their return to work.

7.5 Organisational change

- 7.5.1 It is possible that the employee's role and/or School/Unit may be reviewed during the career break period, and that some changes to the role or School/Unit may occur (e.g., a departmental restructure or grading review). In these circumstances the line manager will contact the employee and consult with them as appropriate in line with the appropriate policy e.g. redundancy.

8. Extending a career break

- 8.1 Employees can request an extension to their career break by emailing their line manager (copying in [HR](#)) and giving at least four months' notice of the intended return date. The line manager will consider such requests however there are no guarantees that requests will be accommodated.

9. Returning to work

- 9.1 Before returning from a career break, the employee must give their line manager at least four months' notice in writing (copying in [HR](#)) of their intention to return to work and their intended return date. If the employee fails to give this notice, the University will usually treat the employee as having resigned from their employment and will terminate their contract with effect from the date on which the career break was due to end.

- 9.2 Employees will normally return to their former post after a career break however in some cases, a return to their former post may not be possible, if for example, due to circumstances identified in section 7.5. In these cases, the employee will be notified of this and placed on the redeployment list and considered for any available suitable alternative roles. Refer to the [Redeployment policy](#).
- 9.3 The line manager should consider and discuss with the employee if re-training is required and/or if the employee requires a re-induction. This will be of particular importance if the employee has been absent for a significant period and/or if there have been changes to the School/Unit during their absence.
- 9.4 If professional or other registration is a pre-requisite of the employee's employment, they must ensure that such registration is up to date before their return. Failure to do so may result in a delay to the return to work.

10. Failure to return to work

- 10.1 Where there is failure to return to work on the intended due date (and no alternative date has been agreed), the employee will usually lose their contractual right to return to work. The University will treat the employee as having resigned from their employment with effect from the date the career break was due to end.
- 10.2 If the employee cannot return to work on the date agreed due to ill-health, they must report their sickness to their line manager in the usual manner in accordance with the [University's Sickness Policy](#). Failure to return to work or provide notification of sickness will be recorded as unauthorised absence and may result in disciplinary action being taken.
- 10.3 10.3 If the employee is prevented from returning to work on the date agreed due to other events outside of their control, they must contact their line manager and report their reason for absence as soon as possible.

11. Resignation

- 11.1 If the employee decides to resign from their employment during a career break, then the normal resignation procedure must be adhered to as outlined in the [Leaving the University](#) guidance.

12. Version control

- 12.1 This policy is non-contractual and may be amended at any time.

- 12.2 This policy may be reviewed in the light of operational experience, sector developments and changing organisational needs. As and when a full review is undertaken, trade union and representatives will be consulted in line with the [Policy Working Group Terms of Reference](#).
- 12.3 Any feedback on the policy content should be directed in the first instance to the [HR Policy Officer](#) or via the [HR Feedback Form](#).

Version number	Purpose / changes	Document status	Author of changes, role and school / unit	Date
1.0	Migration of policy to the Governance Zone.	Published	Lisa Stewart Human Resources	04/06/2019
1.1	Change to review date only.	Published	Lisa Stewart HR	24/05/2023
1.3	Policy review completed with minor changes. Refer to version control for full list of changes.	Published	Lisa Stewart HR	19/08/2024
1.4	Broken link to application form fixed	Published	Lisa Stewart HR	11/11/2025

List of minor changes (1.3)

- New reason added to 2.1: Adapting to a new or changing disability or health condition.
- Line manager is responsible for managing the Career Break process with oversight from Head of School/Unit.
- Factors in considering the request have been reduced/amended.
- Remove reference to Paysave.
- Employees now required to update HR Self-Service with accurate contact details prior to taking a career break.
- Policy now correctly links to the Redeployment Policy if there has been an organisational change which impacts on the role during the career break.
- Wording added to confirm that requests to terminate a career break before the agreed end date will not be granted.
- Employee no longer required to confirm their intended return at the end of each 12-month period.