



University of
St Andrews

Career break policy

Document type	Policy
Scope (applies to)	All staff
Applicability date	28/08/2023
Review / Expiry date	31/12/2023
Approved date	29/08/2023
Approver	Deputy Director of Human Resources
Document owner	Human Resources Officer
School / unit	Human Resources
Document status	Published
Information classification	Public
Equality impact assessment	None
Key terms	Staff/Annual leave and other absence/Career break
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 / unit	Date
1.1	Change to review date only.	Published	Lisa Stewart Human Resources	29/08/2023

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The University is committed to developing work practices and procedures which support work-life balance.
- 1.2 The University recognises that some employees may wish or need to take an extended break from work for a variety of personal reasons during the course of their employment. Employees are referred to in this procedure as “you”.
- 1.3 There is no statutory provision for career breaks; however the University recognises that there may be circumstances where it may be beneficial to you, and to the University, to allow for an unpaid period of time away from work.
- 1.4 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 your contract of employment and may be ended or amended at any time.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to all employees with the requisite service. A career break is defined as leave without pay for a specified period of time. Due to immigration regulations it may not be feasible to agree to requests from individuals who do not have indefinite leave to remain in the UK.
- 2.2 Reasons for a career break may include:
 - Care and/or responsibility for children or other dependants;
 - Personal study, training or development (which will usually be relevant to your work at the University);
 - Any other purpose agreed with the University e.g. overseas travel or voluntary work.
- 2.3 Academic employees wishing to take leave of absence for academic purposes, which are directly linked to their work, should refer to the [Research and/or Research Impact Leave for Academic Staff policy and procedure](#).
- 2.4 The terms of this procedure do not apply to maternity leave, adoption leave, parental leave, paternity leave, special leave or flexible working for which separate University policies are available and can be located on the [HR policy page](#).

3. Aims

- 3.1 This policy has been developed to enable employees to take an extended period of unpaid time away from work in order to balance their career with other commitments, responsibilities and interests. In addition it has been designed to help retain the skills and services of employees who need to take a break in their career, but wish to return to the University. Developed in accordance with the University’s policy on equal opportunities, it aims to provide a sympathetic response to employees wishing to take time away from work, and ensure that all employees are treated in a fair and consistent manner.

4. Principles

4.1 Eligibility

4.1.1 To be considered for the scheme, you must have at least two years' continuous service with the University at the start of your proposed career break. In exceptional circumstances, applications may be considered from employees who have less than two years' service, and this would be reviewed on a case by case basis. Approval will be at the line manager's discretion. You must not have made another application for a career break in the past 12 months (although exceptional circumstances may be considered).

4.1.2 When considering a career break application, the following factors will be taken into account:

- The purpose of, or reasons for, the career break;
- The period of absence requested;
- Your length of service;
- The remaining length of your employment contract;
- Whether you have taken a career break on a previous occasion;
- The operational and/or business needs of the School/Unit including the impact of the career break on its performance and/or work quality;
- The need to retain key skills, knowledge and experience to achieve the University's longer term strategic objectives and ensure that staff expertise is aligned to student/service demand and priority activities;
- The potential to be able to cover the post on a temporary basis and the burden of the costs of this;
- The potential for you to return to a similar/the same post;
- The potential benefits to the School/Unit/University/you.

This list is non-exhaustive therefore other factors may influence the University's decision.

4.1.3 Not all applications will be approved so you must not commit yourself to any plans prior to your application being approved.

4.1.4 The granting of a career break and the duration of the break will be entirely at the University's discretion and the University's decision will be final.

4.1.5 In certain circumstances, a career break may not be the most appropriate arrangement. Where this is the case, an alternative which is more appropriate to the individual case may be agreed between you, the Head of School/Unit, and Human Resources.

4.2 Duration and number of career breaks

4.2.1 A career break will normally last between three months and two years. In exceptional cases, and where practicable, a career break of less than three months or more than two years may be taken by mutual agreement.

4.2.2 In normal circumstances, the University will not grant a career break which is longer than your length of service.

4.2.3 You may seek to take more than one career break, but there will normally be at least five years between each break and separate approval must be sought on each occasion.

4.2.4 The total period of career breaks during your career should not exceed four years.

4.3 Applying for a career break

4.3.1 If you wish to apply for a career break, you should discuss this with your line manager, Head of School/Unit and your Principal Office manager in the first instance.

4.3.2 You should then complete the [career break application form](#) and send it to your Head of School/Unit a minimum of six months in advance of the proposed start date. It is, however, recognised that there may be circumstances beyond your control which prevent you from adhering to this timescale (e.g. a sudden change in personal circumstances) and managers should consider requests accordingly.

4.3.3 On receipt of the application, the line manager will arrange a meeting with you to discuss the request. The Head of School/Unit will be involved in the decision making process and it will be the responsibility of the line manager to inform the employee. When the Head of School/Unit is the person making the application, approval will be sought via the Principal's Office.

4.3.4 Applications will be considered in line with the factors identified in [Section 4.1.2](#).

4.3.5 The actual start date and duration of a career break will be subject to mutual agreement between you, the line manager and the Head of School/Unit.

4.3.6 The Head of School/Unit will inform you of the decision in writing at the earliest opportunity and will provide reasons in cases where a career break is refused.

4.3.7 Where a career break is approved, you will be required to sign a letter to confirm your agreement to the terms and conditions of the career break.

4.3.8 If your career break application is refused, you will be eligible to apply again after 12 months have elapsed from the date of your original application.

4.4 Contractual position during a career break

4.4.1 All career breaks will be unpaid. If you participate in the Paysave Scheme, you can resume membership of Paysave when you return to work if your salary level permits.

4.4.2 A career break will not be regarded as a break in service for the purposes of statutory employment provisions. However, the period of the career break will not count towards any service related benefits, e.g. contractual sickness payments or entitlement to research leave. For these purposes, service before the career break will be aggregated with service after the career break.

4.4.3 If incremental progression applies to you, the progression will be suspended for the duration of the career break, in accordance with paragraph 4.4.2 above, and your incremental date will be amended accordingly. Annual salary on return will be at the same grade and point as when your career break began, adjusted to reflect any cost of living increases awarded during the period of absence if these apply to you.

4.4.4 If you are in the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS pension scheme), your membership will be suspended for the duration of the career break. You will be able to maintain death in service and ill-health entitlements by paying a special contribution.

- 4.4.5 If you are in the University of St Andrews Superannuation and Life Assurance Scheme (S&LAS pension scheme), you will be able to suspend your membership for the duration of your career break.
- 4.4.6 On return from the career break, there will be provision to make AVC (Additional Voluntary Contribution) payments in either pension scheme. For more detail, you should contact the Pensions Administrator via [email](#).
- 4.4.7 There will be no entitlement to holiday pay whilst on a career break and you will not accrue annual leave. Any annual leave owing must be taken before commencement of the career break. There will normally be no payment in lieu for any leave outstanding.
- 4.4.8 There will be no entitlement to sick pay whilst on a career break.
- 4.4.9 When on a career break, you will not be eligible for enhanced maternity pay, enhanced adoption pay or enhanced paternity pay and you should be advised that entitlement to Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP), Statutory Adoption Pay (SAP) and Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP) may also be affected since SMP, SAP and SPP are calculated on the basis of your salary in the weeks before the Expected Week of Childbirth (or “matching week” for adoption). If you wish to know how the rules apply to a particular situation, you are strongly advised to seek advice from your [HR Business Partner](#).
- 4.4.10 If you perceive any conflict of interest, consent must be obtained from the University for any paid work undertaken during the career break (other than contact days as outlined in 4.5). All provisions in your contract relating to confidential information and your duties of fidelity will continue to apply.
- 4.4.11 It is your responsibility to establish with the Social Security Agency whether you are entitled to any social security benefits and to check the position regarding National Insurance contributions.

4.5 Keeping in touch

- 4.5.1 You should supply your Head of School/Unit and/or line manager with contact details for the period of absence and notify the University if these details change. If you will be out of the country and wish to nominate a representative whom the University can correspond with, then these contact details should also be supplied to your line manager.
- 4.5.2 You (or your nominated representative) and the Head of School/Unit/line manager should maintain reasonable contact during the career break period to make the return to work easier for both parties. It is recommended that you and the Head of School/Unit/line manager discuss what level of contact there will be in advance of the career break commencing.
- 4.5.3 The Head of School/Unit is responsible for keeping you informed of any significant workplace developments during your career break which may be relevant to your employment.
- 4.5.4 Depending on the length of the career break, you may be expected to maintain any professional links and keep-up-to-date with any significant developments in your area of work.

- 4.5.5 You may occasionally be requested to attend work to update skills and/or familiarise yourself with changes in the work place. You are not obliged to do any work or attend any events during a career break and will not be penalised for refusing to do so; nor is a Head of School/Unit/line manager obliged to offer you work. You and the Head of School/Unit/line manager must agree any arrangements for working during the career break, including the work to be undertaken. Work could include any activity done under the contract of employment, but may also include training or other events.
- 4.5.6 You will be given a minimum of one month's notice of any request to attend work during a career break, and will be paid at the rate of pay applicable prior to the start of the career break or the appropriate rate for the work you undertake on these days. You will be paid per hour up to a maximum of 7.25 hours per day. Any period of paid work for the University during a career break will not count towards service-related benefits. Managers will be responsible for completing and returning the [keeping in touch form](#) to the Salaries Office in order that any necessary salary payments can be made.

4.6 Appointments

- 4.6.1 You may apply for any internally or externally advertised posts that arise at the University during the career break, but will be required to accept the post at the time of offer and take up duties when required.

4.7 Organisational change including promotion / role review

- 4.7.1 It is possible that your role will be reviewed in your absence and that some element of organisational change such as a change in grade may occur or that a restructure will take place that will affect your future employment. In these circumstances the University will consult with you as appropriate. Academic, Research and Teaching staff on a career break will not normally be considered for promotion, but may apply in accordance with usual procedures upon their return to work.

4.8 Resignation

- 4.8.1 If you decide to resign from your post during a career break, you must submit a written statement of resignation to the Head of School/Unit in advance of the agreed return to work date in accordance with your contractual notice period.
- 4.8.2 If your career break has followed a period of maternity or adoption leave and you do not return to work then you will normally be required to repay the enhanced element of any Maternity Pay or Adoption Pay received.
- 4.8.3 Before returning from a career break, you must give your Head of School/Unit at least four months' notice in writing of your intention to return to work (or the length of your career break if shorter). If you fail to give this notice, the University will usually treat you as having resigned from your employment with effect from the date on which your career break was due to end.
- 4.8.4 Where there is failure to return on the due date and no alternative date has been agreed, you will usually lose your contractual right to return to work. The University will treat you as having resigned from your employment with effect from the date your career break was due to end.

4.9 Returning to work

- 4.9.1 Providing that the terms and conditions of this policy and any subsequent agreement between you and the University are met, paragraph 4.9.2 below will apply.
- 4.9.2 The University will make all reasonable effort to place you in your former post on your return from a career break. Where this is not possible, the [University's redeployment policy](#) will apply.
- 4.9.3 Where this is not possible, you will be offered up to two alternative permanent or temporary vacancies under the Redeployment Policy. If the University considers that you have rejected two reasonable offers of employment (which may include redeployment to a lower grade), the University will be under no obligation to offer further vacancies and the University's obligations to you under this policy will cease and the [Redundancy policy](#) will apply.
- 4.9.4 If you are granted a career break of more than two years' duration, you must also confirm your intention to return to work, in writing, at the end of each twelve month period.
- 4.9.5 If you wish to return from a career break early, you should put in a request in writing to your Head of School/Unit at the earliest opportunity and at least four months in advance of the date on which you wish to return. This will be considered by your line manager and/or Head of School/Unit and you will be informed in writing if this is possible.
- 4.9.6 If you wish to apply for an extension to a career break, you should do so using the [career break application form](#) stating the reasons why you wish to extend your career break, at least four months in advance of the agreed return to work date. It is recognised that there may be circumstances beyond your control which prevent you from adhering to this timescale and managers should consider requests accordingly.
- 4.9.7 The Head of School/Unit (in consultation with Human Resources) will give sympathetic consideration to requests to return early or to extend a career break. However there is no guarantee that requests to return early or extend a career break will be accommodated.
- 4.9.8 If you are prevented from returning to work on the date agreed due to ill-health, you must contact the Head of School/Unit as soon as possible. The right to return to work may be extended beyond the notified date of return, providing an appropriate medical certificate has been submitted and the terms of the University Sickness policy are adhered to.
- 4.9.9 Failure to return to work or provide notification of sickness will be classed as unauthorised absence and may result in disciplinary action.
- 4.9.10 If you are prevented from returning to work on the date agreed due to other events outside of your control, you must contact the Head of School/Unit as soon as possible. The right to return to work may be extended beyond the notified date of return providing that appropriate evidence to support the reason for the delay is submitted.
- 4.9.11 On your return to work, the Head of School/Unit should ensure that a comprehensive re-induction process is put in place which includes, for example, training on any new systems or procedures that have been introduced during the period of absence and briefing on any changes that will affect you such as pay awards, reorganisations or new legislation. This will include PVG scheme record update and Occupational Health referral, if appropriate.

4.9.12 If professional or other registration is a pre-requisite of your employment, you must ensure that such registration is up to date before your return. Failure to do so will result in a delay to your return to work and in some circumstances the University may decide paragraphs 4.9.1 and 4.9.2 of this procedure will not apply to you.

5. Responsibilities

Role	Responsible for
Employee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussing the application with their line manager. • Submitting an application to their Head of School/Unit in accordance with required notice periods. • Signing the letter to confirm their agreement to the terms and conditions of an approved career break. • Providing their Head of School/Unit/line manager with contact details for the period of absence. • Maintaining good two-way communication with their Head of School/Unit/line manager during the career break. • Maintaining professional or skill competencies whilst on the career break. • Making a request in writing to the Head of School/Unit if the employee wishes to undertake paid employment during the career break (other than contact days under section 4.5). • Giving the Head of School/Unit notice of the employee's intention to return to work in accordance with required notice periods or notifying them if unable to return to work on the agreed date.
Head of School/Unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving full consideration to career break applications in consultation with the employee and their line manager. • Notifying the employee of the decision in writing, providing reasons where a career break has been refused. • Forwarding the completed application form to Human Resources. • Ensuring that approved career breaks can be accommodated within the School/Unit and that suitable arrangements are in place to cover the period of absence. • Keeping the employee on a career break informed of any significant workplace developments which may be relevant to their employment. • Ensuring that the employee receives a comprehensive re-induction on their return to work.
Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing guidance and advice to the individual, the line manager and the Head of School/Unit on any aspect of the career break procedure. • Confirming the terms and conditions of an approved career break in writing. • Informing payroll of any changes to salary or pension contributions relating to the career break.

6. Version control

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 Human Resources	29/08/2023