

Central Services Agency Handbook Document



CAREER BREAK SCHEME

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This career break scheme has been introduced as a direct result of the Agency's Equal Opportunities Policy. This scheme applies equally to men. It does not affect other arrangements for granting unpaid leave.
- 1.2 A Career Break is special leave without pay for a specified period of time.
- 1.3 During the period of the career break the individual will continue to be considered an employee of the Agency.

2. OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The objectives of the career break scheme are:
 - to retrain skills and expertise within the Agency;
 - to facilitate employees who wish to take a career break;
 - to provide new job opportunities in the Health Services.

3. PURPOSE

- 3.1 A career break may be allowed for employees who are taking prime responsibility for the care of children, who are adopting children or who have to care for elderly and/or disabled relatives.

A career break will not normally be allowed for the primary purpose of taking up alternative salaried or wage earning employment. Requests for career breaks for other reasons will only be considered in exceptional circumstances and on the merits of the application. Career breaks for the purpose of undertaking voluntary work overseas will also be considered.

4. ELIGIBILITY

- 4.1 All employees who have satisfactorily completed one year's service (following basic training) within the NHS may apply for special leave without pay for a career break.
- 4.2 Each application will be considered on the merits of the individual case. However, it may not be possible to grant release in every case because of the needs of the service. Applications from employees in scarcity grades will require careful consideration and release may depend on suitable replacements being available.
- 4.3 Applicants will be advised by their Section Head of the reasons for a refusal. Staff on a retainer scheme shall have access to the Agency's normal grievance/appeals system but matters arising from the applications of this agreement shall not be appealable beyond the Agency level.

5. DURATION AND NUMBER OF CAREER BREAKS

- 5.1 The total period of special leave without pay available to an individual employee for career break purposes will not exceed a maximum of five years during employment in the Health Service. Special leave without pay for a career break may be granted for a period of not less than one year and for any period in excess of a year up to a maximum of five years.
- 5.2 A career break may be extended twice for a period of not less than one year on each occasion provided that the total period does not exceed five years in all.
- 5.3 On return to work following a career break one additional break may be granted subject to the total maximum of five years provided the period of service between the career breaks is not less than the initial career break (including any extensions).

6. CONDUCT DURING CAREER BREAKS

- 6.1 During a career break the employee will be subject to all normal regulations as to conduct. Disciplinary action may be taken, where appropriate.

7. APPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Applications giving at least three months' notice (unless circumstances make it impossible) should be made to your Section Head on a standard form obtainable from the Directorate of Human Resources of the CSA and should state the purpose of the career break and the period of time for which it is being sought.

7.2 Any outstanding arrangements such as lump sum payments in connection with car allowances, car loans, leasing of official vehicles, excess rent allowances, etc must be resolved before agreement can be given to a request for a career break.

7.3 The date on which a career break begins will be a management decision taking into consideration the circumstances of the application and the likely time lag in filling the vacancy created.

7.4 Employees on a career break should provide the Human Resources Directorate with a forwarding address, and will be responsible for keeping the information up-to-date.

8. CONTINUITY OF SERVICE

8.1 Periods of service before and after a career break will be treated as continuous for conditions of service purposes. Any period of special leave without pay for a career break will not count for superannuation purposes. Employees considering a career break should consult the Salaries and Wages Department about their superannuation position.

9. RETURN TO WORK

9.1 While no guarantee of a return to a particular post can be given, every effort will be made to place individuals in suitable posts.

9.2 In reaching the decision on availability and suitability of a post, the following factors will be taken into account:-

9.2.1 There must be a vacancy at the same or lower grade within a reasonable timescale (six months before and up to six months after the end of the career break).

9.2.2 The person must meet the normal recruitment and selection criteria for the post.

9.2.3 The person will be required to undertake any training needed to ensure that their knowledge and skills continue to be adequate to discharge the function of the job to which they are returning. This will be a condition of acceptance for a career break and the detailed requirements will be specified by management.

9.3 Those employees returning from a career break will not normally be assigned to their former posts or locations. If on return to duty a vacancy does not exist in the grade formerly held by the employee he or she can be offered a lower

graded post (with the appropriate terms and conditions of service). Every effort will be made to relocate the employee to a suitable post at their original grade as soon as possible. Where an employee is relocated, excess travelling expenses will not be paid.

9.4 If prior to the commencement of a career break an employee was working in a part-time/job sharing arrangement every effort will be made to allow the employee to return on that basis. However, there can be no guarantee that this will always be possible and in these circumstances employees may be offered a full-time post.

9.5 Employees on a career break must contact the Human Resources Directorate six months before they are due to return to:

- (a) confirm that they intend to return on the due date; or
- (b) apply for an extension of the career break; or
- (c) indicate that they wish to resign.

9.6 Employees who take career breaks of more than one year's duration must contact the Human Resources Directorate at the end of each 12 month period to confirm their intention to return to their employment.

9.7 Employees who are unable to resume duty on the due date because of illness will be required to produce supporting medical evidence.

10. Management will throughout the period of a career break assess compliance with the terms under which the break was granted and determine appropriate action in circumstances of non-compliance.

11. PROMOTION

Employees will be free to apply for promotion during a career break. However, they would have to accept the promotion at the time of offer and take up duties when required.

12. SOCIAL SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS

12.1 It is the responsibility of individual employees taking a career break to contact the Department of Health and Social Services through the local Social Security Office, to determine whether they are entitled to any benefits and to check the position with regard to National Insurance Contributions.