

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. A career break is an extended period of unpaid leave from the workplace. Career breaks are typically used to pursue personal interests, such as travelling, volunteering or personal development. They can also be used to provide a period of care for a dependant. Career breaks can be of benefit to both employees and the University by improving work-life balance, making savings and supporting the attraction and retention of staff.
- 1.2. Under the University Career Break Policy, eligible employees can request to take an unpaid career break of between 3 and 24 months. Requests will be considered by either the Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development (where there are no pension implications) or University Executive (where there are pension implications), on the basis of the operational needs of the employee's workplace. Unpaid leave for periods of less than 3 months can be requested using the University's Unpaid Leave Policy.
- 1.3. Career breaks are distinct from study leave, leave of absence, secondments and other extended periods of leave such as maternity leave. This policy is not intended to replace or restrict the use of any existing leave practices.
- 1.4. The University also has in place a number of schemes to support work-life balance that employees may want to consider. These are available at <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/hr/policy-and-procedure/flexiblework/> or on request from the Human Resources Department.
- 1.5. The provisions of the policy do not form part of an employee's terms and conditions of employment and, as such, the University reserves the right to withdraw the Career Break Policy without notice or consultation at any time.

## **2. Eligibility**

- 2.1. Employees can request a career break where they meet all of the following criteria:
  - They have at least two years' continuous service at the start of the proposed leave period;
  - Completed your probation period.
  - They have not taken a career break (as defined under this Scheme) in the 5 years preceding the start date of the proposed career break; and
  - If employed in an externally-funded post, their funding arrangements allow for a career break and they have the written permission of their funding body to do so for the period being requested.
- 2.2. Where an employee meets these criteria, an unpaid career break of between 3 and 24 months can be requested.

### **3. Terms of the Career break Scheme**

#### **3.1. Exclusivity and confidentiality**

- 3.1.1. To avoid potential conflicts of interest, employees must not undertake paid or unpaid work for another organisation during their career break without the prior approval of the University. Details of such activities must be disclosed on the request form which can be completed in Welsh or English. If the purpose of the career break is to carry out work for another organisation, a secondment rather than a career break may be more appropriate. Information on the University's secondment policy is available at <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/hr/policy-and-procedure/secondment/>
- 3.1.2. During their career break, employees are expected to comply with any University requirements with regards to confidentiality, financial regulations and intellectual property.

#### **3.2. Contact during career breaks**

- 3.2.1. Employees must provide their contact details during the career break.
- 3.2.2. Employees on an extended career break will normally be required to keep in touch and familiarise themselves with changes in the work environment whilst they are away by arrangement with their Department. This time will normally be unpaid, but will not be onerous.

#### **3.3. Annual leave**

- 3.3.1. There will be no entitlement to holiday pay whilst on a career break and the employee will not accrue annual leave. Any annual leave owing must be taken before commencement of the career break. There will be no payment in lieu for any leave outstanding.

#### **3.4. Returning to work**

- 3.4.1. The employee is expected to return to work from their career break on the date agreed. If the employee wants to resign from the University, notice must still be given in accordance with their terms and conditions of employment.
- 3.4.2. It is expected that the employee will return from their career break to their substantive post. If this is not possible, they will be allocated to a post on no less favourable terms and conditions of employment however if the position becomes redundant it will be dealt with in accordance with the Redundancy Avoidance Policy.
- 3.4.3. If the employee wishes to return to work earlier than agreed, they should put this request in writing to their Faculty PVC/Head of Professional Service Department) at the earliest opportunity, and at least four months in advance of the date they wish to return. If the employee wishes to extend their career break (but not past the 24 month maximum) they must make this request at least four months before the initial return to work date. It cannot be guaranteed that requests to reduce or extend the career break will be agreed to.
- 3.4.4. If the employee is prevented from returning on the agreed date due to an event outside of their control, they must contact their Faculty PVC/Head of Professional Service Department as soon as possible. The right to return to work may be

extended beyond the agreed date of return providing that appropriate evidence to support the reason for the delay is submitted.

- 3.4.5. Where there is a failure to return to work on the agreed return date and no alternative date has been agreed, the employee may lose their right to return to work. The employer will contact the employee using the agreed contact details, giving them 7 days to respond. If no response has been received, the employee will be considered to have resigned.

### **3.5. Resignation**

- 3.5.1. If an employee decides to resign from their post during a career break, they must submit their resignation in writing in Welsh or English to the Faculty PVC/Head of Professional Service Department in advance of the agreed return to work date in accordance with their contractual notice period.

### **3.6. Pension**

- 3.6.1. A career break will not count towards pensionable service and the University will not pay employees' contributions to pension schemes during a career break. If an employee wishes to continue paying their contributions during the career break they should discuss this with the Finance Department.
- 3.6.2. Employees in the USS pension scheme will have their membership suspended for the duration of the career break. They will be able to maintain death in service and ill-health entitlements by paying a special contribution.
- 3.6.3. All employer contributions to the Aberystwyth University Legal and General Pension Scheme will cease, but you will be able to continue to make employee contribution. On returning to work, you will be able to restart contributions immediately, but as you have not been earning during the period, no employer contributions are due.

### **3.7. Other provisions**

- 3.7.1. A career break will not be regarded as continuous service with the University.
- 3.7.2. Incremental progression will be suspended during a career break, but will recommence upon return to work. An employee will return to a salary that will reflect any negotiated annual salary settlements.
- 3.7.3. If any change is proposed to an employee's terms and conditions of employment that requires formal consultation, the University will enter into discussions with the employee as required by legislation and University's procedures.

## **4. Making a request**

- 4.1. Requests should be made using the attached form and submitted to the Faculty PVC/Head of Professional Service Department at least 6 months in advance of the start of the proposed break. This is to allow adequate time for consideration of the request and, if approved, to plan for the employee's absence. Faculty PVC/Head of Professional Service Department may choose to consider requests made with shorter notice at their discretion.

4.2 Employees considering applying for a career break should ensure they read the terms of the Scheme (section 5, below) before applying.

## **5. Consideration of the request**

5.1 The request will be considered by either the Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development (where there are no pension implications) or by the University Executive (where there are pension implications), in consultation with the employee's Faculty PVC/Head of Professional Service Department. As not all requests will necessarily be approved, employees are advised not to commit themselves to any plans prior to a decision being made on their request.

5.2 As a career break involves a substantial absence from the workplace, requests will be considered on the basis of the impact the break will have on operational requirements and if it is in the management's interest to agree to the request. This will include (but is not limited to) consideration of:

- Likely workload (individual and/or team) during the proposed period;
- Impact of the absence on other employees' workloads and to avoid overloading;
- The need to retain and align key skills, knowledge and experience with strategic needs and/or operational demand;
- Ability to recruit additional staff, if needed;
- Potential impact on the unit's performance and/or quality of work;
- Periods of leave already taken by the employee and the impact of further leave on operational requirements;
- Periods of leave being taken by other employees that coincide with the request and the impact on operational requirements;
- The remaining length of service on the employee's contract of employment;
- Whether an extension to any fixed term funded posts are required and if the request is supported by the funding body;
- Any other relevant operational issues;
- Health and Wellbeing opportunity for the individual. Benefit that it provides to the employee.

5.3 A career break request can be refused on operational grounds. In some instances an alternative period of leave may be suggested. If an alternative arrangement is agreed, a new request form should be completed to reflect this. If a request is refused and an alternative arrangement cannot be agreed, the employee will be informed of the reasons for refusal in writing.

5.4 If the request is agreed, one of the conditions of the career break is that the employee provides their line manager with contact details for the duration of the break, (i.e. a forwarding address, telephone number and email address). This will enable the University to keep the employee informed of any substantial developments in the workplace.

5.5 It is good practice before the career break commences for employees and managers to discuss handover arrangements and arrangements for returning to work.

## **6. Appeals Procedure**

Appeals should be submitted in writing in Welsh or English to the Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development within 5 working days of receipt of the outcome. The appeal will be considered as a desk top exercise where all the paperwork and processes followed will be considered.

The decision will be communicated in writing within a further 2 working days. There will be no further right of appeal under the Career Break Policy.

## **7. Policy Review**

Human Resources will co-ordinate a review of this policy in order to maintain compliance with legislation and good practice. The review will be undertaken in liaison with the recognised trade unions and any proposed amendments will be submitted to the appropriate relevant committee, University Executive and Council if required.

## **8. Equality Impact Assessment**

The University is committed to embedding the Equality Scheme into its policies, procedures and practices. This policy has been equality impact assessed in accordance with this scheme.

## **9. Welsh Language – Employee Rights**

In accordance with the Welsh Language Standards that came into effect on 1 April 2018 employees have the right to use the Welsh language to

- (a) make a complaint
- (b) respond to a complaint or allegation

and employees also have the right to use the Welsh language in meetings where they are the subject of

- (c) complaints and allegations (or have made the complaint)
- (d) disciplinary proceedings
- (e) effective contribution scheme discussions
- (f) individual consultation meetings

A simultaneous translation service from Welsh to English will be provided at the meeting when the meeting cannot be conducted solely in Welsh.

The university has, in conjunction with its recognised trade unions, incorporated the above requirements into all relevant HR policy and procedural documents.