Career break policy

Date of issue: July 2025

Changes since previous version:

- Some additional wording to provide clarity to the process.
- Insertion of Job Title for those managing the process
- Clarity on timescales and process followed
- Updated LPP contact details
- Confirmation that misconduct whilst on career break may lead to disciplinary action

The professional associations and / or trade unions have been consulted on this document and HFL Education recommends it for adoption.

© HFL Education

Contents

1. Scope 3
2. Objectives 3
3. Requesting a Career Break 3
4. Length of career break 4
5. During a career break 4
6. Pensions deductions 5
7. Organisational change 5
8. Extending the career break 5
9. Ending the career break early 5
10. If the employee does not return from the career break 5
11. Conduct during a career break 6
12. Returning to work after a career break 6

© HFL Education

1. Scope

This policy applies to all permanent employees only, with at least five years continuous service, regardless of the number of hours worked. Employees must also not be subject to any ongoing formal capability or disciplinary process to be eligible to apply for a career break.

This policy does not form part of anybody's contract of employment and may be varied from time to time.

2. Objectives

It is recognised that during an employee's working life there will be times when personal commitments or development opportunities may take priority over work, e.g. bringing up children, longer-term care for sick or dependent relatives, extended travel, or pursuing a course of further education or a personal interest. We may be able to accommodate these, where operationally practicable, through career breaks. Alternatively, employees may wish to consider making a flexible working request instead of taking a career break, and such requests should be made through the Flexible Working policy. Where we believe a career break is not the most appropriate way of meeting the employee's needs, we may suggest a more appropriate alternative.

A career break will not be permitted where it is for the purposes of taking up alternative employment or starting a personal business venture, save as set out at clause 3 of this policy.

3. Requesting a Career Break

Career breaks enable employees to take an unpaid break from work for personal reasons whilst maintaining their continuity of service.

The employee should first discuss the career break informally with the Headteacher to outline the reason for the request and the proposed length of absence and to consider how their workload may be managed whilst they are away.

The employee should then submit a written application for a career break to the Headteacher using the 'Time off Work request form'. This should be submitted at least three months before the anticipated start date, but a shorter notice can be accepted at the School discretion where it was not practicable to provide the minimum notice period, for example where a dependent needs care at short notice.

The employee's contract of employment will continue, however all renumeration and benefits will be suspended for the duration of the career break. Employees on a career break may in exceptional circumstances take up a part time role, for example, to support a university course or extended travel. Permission must be sought from the Headteacher before commencing other employment and authorisation shall be entirely at their discretion.

Each application will be considered on its own merits. The Employee should not commit themselves to plans before the School has agreed to the application for a career break in writing.

When considering the application, the following are examples of factors that will be taken into account:

(a) the purpose of, or reasons for, the career break.

(b) the period of absence requested.

(c) the employee's performance and disciplinary record.

(d) the number and length of any previous career breaks taken.

(e) the operational needs of the School's.

(f) the need to retain the employee's skills, knowledge and experience.

(g) the School's ability to cover the employee's duties during the career break.

(h) the potential benefits of the proposed career break.

The employee's request in writing will be responded to in writing within four working weeks of receipt of a written application.

If the employee's request for a career break is refused, the reasons for the decision will be explained.

If a request is accepted, the start and return dates of the career break will be confirmed in writing and shall set out the changes to the employee's terms of employment. The employee must sign and return a copy of this letter to accept the changes. Until this is received, the employee's career break is not agreed.

4. Length of career break

The minimum length of a career break is three months. For teaching and classroom-based staff the expectation would be for this to equate to a term. The maximum duration is one year.

There is no limit to the number of career breaks an employee can take, providing they return to work for a minimum of two years between each break and provided that the total time taken in career breaks does not exceed one year. A new application must be made under this policy for each career break requested.

Before the career break starts, employees should agree how they will maintain contact with the School during the period of leave and the date that they will return to work at the end.

5. During a career break

Unless specifically agreed at the time the employee's career break is approved, the employee shall not be obliged to do any work during the agreed career break and will not be penalised for declining to do so. The School shall also not be obliged to offer the employee work whilst they are on a career break.

The employee shall share in the responsibility for keeping in touch with the School during their career break. The School shall keep the employee up to date with any changes and the employee should inform the Headteacher of any change of address or other contact or personal details during their career break.

© HFL Education

6. Pensions deductions

Pension deductions will not automatically be made during a career break.

Teaching staff should contact the Teacher's Pension scheme for details on how their pension benefits may be impacted by a career break.

If non-teaching staff wish to request to pay Additional Pension Contributions (APCs) to cover the amount of pension 'lost' during this period, they should make an election to the Local Pensions Partnership Administration (LPPA) within 30 days of returning to work.

Employees should visit LGPS Tools and calculators and click the 'Buy Lost Pension contributions' option to calculate the cost to buy back lost pension. Contact the School's payroll provider to find out the amount of lost pensionable pay to enter onto the form.

The quote obtained from the LGPS website should be submitted to the LPPA by uploading the completed LGPS application form into the LPPA's contact form.

The LPPA will then contact the School to set up the deduction from an employee's pay, and once the start date for the deduction has been confirmed with the School the LPPA will write to the employee to let them know that the APC has been approved.

Contact the LPPA with any questions about the purchase of lost pension on 0300 323 0260 or use the 'contact form' on their website.

7. Organisational change

If an employee is on a career break when their role is affected by reorganisation, restructuring or redundancy, every effort will be made to contact them to enable them to have input into any consultations or feedback processes. Employees may be given the opportunity to return to work early if they wish to, and if this can be accommodated by the School.

Employees on a career break may be included in selection processes even if the School is unable to contact them.

8. Extending the career break

An employee may request to extend their career break if the original break taken is less than one year. Such requests shall be considered at the School's discretion. Employees must do so in writing giving at least 4 working weeks' notice. The School may consider requests outside of this timeframe at its discretion, The extension will be considered along the same lines as the original request and the total duration of the career break will be no longer than one year.

9. Ending the career break early

There will be no automatic right to end a career break earlier than planned, but requests from an employee will be considered if they can be accommodated. If an employee does wish to return to work earlier than previously agreed, they are required to give a minimum of 4 working weeks' notice.

10. If the employee does not return from the career break

If an employee does not wish to return from a career break, they should confirm this in writing

© HFL Education

to the Headteacher in accordance with their contractual notice, prior to their expected return date, unless the amount of notice required has been varied by agreement with the School.

11. Conduct during a career break

Employees should be aware that they remain employed during a career break. Whilst an employee's off-duty hours are their personal concern, they should not put themselves in a position where their duties to the School and private interests' conflict. The standards articulated in the School's Code of Conduct should be maintained during a career break. Failure to adhere to the required standards may result in disciplinary action being taken.

12. Returning to work after a career break

When an employee returns to work, there may be a requirement to undertake safer recruitment checks as set out in Keeping Children Safe in Education. This will be determined by the nature and/or the duration of the career break.

Upon return to work, at an agreed date following the career break, where reasonably practicable, the employee will be offered the opportunity to return to the same or similar post to the one held before their career break on the same terms and conditions that applied immediately prior to the commencement of the career break, unless their employment has terminated, or their usual terms and conditions of employment have been permanently varied prior to the career break ending. Where the School deems that it is not reasonably practicable to offer the employee their previous post at the end of their career break, the employee shall be given priority consideration for any suitable alternative post without competitive selection and where such a post is available.

If the employee is unable to return to work on the agreed return date due to ill health, they must contact the Headteacher as soon as possible and in accordance with the School's Health & Attendance Policy.

When an employee returns to work following a career break, they should be given support with re-integrating, this can include:

- undertaking any statutory update training specifically relating to safeguarding.
- updating them on any changes that may have occurred.
- ensuring they read and accept (where required) important documentation and policies.
- attending regular review meetings with their line manager to ensure sufficient support is in place
- registering on any relevant training and skills development courses.
- setting objectives in line with School priorities and individual development plans.