



“An Excellent Authority”

Service Instruction
<<Career breaks>>

<<POD.>>

Document Control

Description and Purpose

This document is intended to give guidance to any employee who wished to request a career break

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Permanent		Temporary	If temporary, review date must be 3 months or less.	

Amendment History

Version	Date	Reasons for Change	Amended by
New			

Equalities Impact Assessment

Initial	Full	Date	Reviewed by	Document location
	X	May 2010	DAG	Public Folders

Civil Contingencies Impact Assessment (if applicable)

Date	Assessed by	Document location

Related Documents

Doc. Type	Ref. No.	Title	Document location
Policy		Work Life Balance	Committee Services

Contact

Department	Email	Telephone ext.
POD	amandacross@merseyfire.gov.uk	4358

Target audience

All MFS	X	Ops Crews	Fire safety	Community FS
Principal officers		Senior officers	Non uniformed	

Career Breaks

Introduction

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority aims to support a proactive approach to work-life balance, recognising that our employees may benefit from unpaid time away from work to pursue other activities without resigning from the Authority. These could include the provision of family care; study or training; travel; voluntary work or time off for personal development.

Potentially all employees have the opportunity to take a career break. However at more senior management levels and in specialist posts, there may be issues with regards to filling the post for the duration of the intended career break, and the options for the individual when they are due to return to work

The Authority will consider any requests for unpaid leave of four weeks or more as a Career Break. The Authority will consider requests for up to 5 years in duration with the agreement of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer.

Eligibility

Permanent employees with over two year's service at the time they wish the Career Break to commence are eligible to apply for a career break. Employees should have acceptable levels of performance and conduct in order to apply for a career break

Applying for a career break

Applications for a Career Break must be submitted on the Application for a Career Break form giving a minimum of 3 months notice of the requested start date of the Career Break. In exceptional circumstances applications may be considered at shorter notice. This form is located currently on *Public Folders/Forms/Time & Resource Management/Attendance Management* and should be submitted to the "Flexible Working" e-mail address.

Each application will be considered and assessed by the Flexible Working panel in consultation with the employee's manager.

Employees will be notified in writing within 28 days of their application being submitted as to whether their application for a career break has been accepted or rejected. Should an application be rejected, the reasons for rejection will be confirmed in writing.

The granting of a Career Break is discretionary and not an entitlement and each application will be considered on its merits. Where a Career Break is refused, the Employees may appeal against the decision to the Director of People & Organisational Development via the extant grievance process.

Start date of a Career Break

The commencement date will be mutually agreed between the Authority and the Employee.

A Career Break following a period of Maternity or Adoption leave will not start until the period of Maternity or Adoption leave has expired.

If an employee wishes to take a career break immediately following a period maternity leave, there will be no requirement for her to return to work for three months in order to avoid repayment of maternity pay. However, if the employee subsequently resigns during the course of the career break, or fails to return at the end, she would be expected to pay back additional maternity pay.

Extending or Reducing the duration of the career break

During the period of a Career Break, the employee may request the period to be extended or reduced by writing to Policy and Contracts or emailing the “Flexible Working” e-mail box giving a minimum of 3 months notice. Preference will not be given to extensions simply because the employee is currently on a Career Break.

The employee will be notified in writing to advise if the application had been accepted or refused. If accepted a new Agreement will be issued to the employee to sign and return. If rejected, the employee will be notified in writing and given the right of appeal. The employee will be required to return to work on the original intended date of return.

The contractual position

It is the Authority’s policy that employees are NOT required to resign their employment as part of the Career Break agreement. However, during the period of the Career Break the employee’s contract of employment is effectively suspended for that period.

All accumulated annual, PH and Flexi leave will be used prior to the commencement of a Career Break. Employees who take more holiday than they have accrued will be required to repay the over payment.

Annual and PH leave will not accrue during the career break. When the employee returns to work they will be granted annual and PH leave pro-rata to the period left of that particular leave year.

Employees will not accrue any length of service for pension or seniority purposes for the duration of the Career Break. Individuals should contact the Pay and Pensions department on 0151 296 4922 for further advice on the impact that the period of unpaid leave will have on their pension position and any death in service benefits.

Employees are encouraged to contact Her Majesties Revenues and Customs office to discuss the impact that a Career Break will have on Government benefits.

LLAR employees whilst on a career break will not be allowed to reside in Authority accommodation nor will they receive the allowance for doing so.

Employees who become pregnant while on a career break are entitled to the same maternity benefits as those not taking a career break. The expectant employee should give notice to Pay and Pensions as soon as reasonably practicable with the MATBI. This will enable the provisions of the maternity scheme to take effect and the career break will be suspended

(unless the employee confirms that she does not wish the provisions of the maternity scheme to be applied to her)

Resumption of the career break post maternity should be subject to further agreement between the Director of People and Organisational Development and the individual.

Conditions of a Career Break

Employees should supply the Authority with contact details for the period of absence and notify the Authority if these details change.

- The employee is expected to maintain any professional links and keep up to date with significant developments in their area of work. With mutual agreement, an employee may occasionally be requested to attend work to up date skills and/or familiarise themselves with changes on the workplace.
- Employees should not enter into any other permanent paid contracted employment with any other employer unless written permission is obtained from the Director of POD.
- If the employee engages in any acts or omissions during their career break, which in the opinion of the Authority impacts on their employment, the Disciplinary Procedure may be invoked.

Returning to Work following a career break

An employee must contact the Authority at least 3 months in advance of their intended date of return to confirm that they are returning to work with the Authority on the expected date. After the employee has informed the Authority that they wish to return to work, arrangements will be made for them to:

- Attend a meeting with the appropriate manager to discuss their return to work.
- Have current opportunities within the department/Authority brought to their attention.

The Authority may also investigate the potential for a phased return to work where the employee feels this would assist their integration back into the workplace. Salary for a phased return agreement would be on a pro-rata basis.

Resignation During a Career Break

If an Employee wishes to resign from the Authority at any time during the Career Break must advise the Authority in writing as soon as reasonably practical.

Non-Return from a Career Break on the Intended Date of Return

Where an Employee does not return to work on the intended date without seeking a formal extension or without prior notification of resignation, they may be subject to disciplinary action following investigation by the Authority.

An employee who reaches the end of their Career Break and cannot resume work because of illness will be required to produce a medical certificate.

Role upon returning to employment

If a Career Break is for 12 months or less then an employee will return to work with the Authority to the same role held when their Career Break commenced. However, the Authority reserves the right to alter the location or watch for an operational employee.

However, if the Career Break is for a period of 12 months or more, upon return to work, the following provisions will apply:

- If available, the Employee will return to the substantive position they held prior to commencing their Career Break, on the terms and conditions applicable to that role. This will reflect pay awards (not including incremental pay) made during the break unless the employee is on pay protection. In this case, they will receive the protected amount upon return, should that amount not have been exceeded by pay awards during the period of the break.
- If the Employee's substantive role is no longer available, the Authority will seek to find suitable alternative employment at the same level which may not be within the same department or location.

The new incremental date will be the anniversary of their return to the Authority.

On re-employment, previous continuous service will count for entitlement to leave, sickness and maternity provisions

Clearances upon return to work

Employees returning to work will be required to pass the appropriate clearance before returning to employment with the Authority. These clearances include:

- The appropriate medical assessment conducted by the Authority's Occupational Health Department to ensure that they are fit for operational competence,
- An updated CRB disclosure prior to their return to work for those employees whose role may involve coming into contact with children and/or vulnerable adults.

Where the Authority does not receive either of the above clearances and/or they do not meet our requirements, the offer of re-employment to the Authority may be reconsidered.

Re-training

Employees returning to work to operational/MACC post will require a period of refresher training to ensure their operational competence, the extent of which will depend on the duration of the career break. This decision will be taken in consultation with the individual, Line Manager and the Authority's Training and Development Department. All refresher training will be carried out in an individual's own time and only once deemed competent would pay be reinstated at the appropriate rate.

For non-operational staff a training and development programme will be agreed in consultation with the employee who is returning to work.

Where the individual is deemed not competent to return to work after the period of refresher training the Authority's offer of re-employment may be reconsidered.

Further information

For further advice or information regarding the Career Break scheme, please contact Policy and Contracts team on 0151 296 4325.

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