

SUPPORTING THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE

(C) Career Break Policy

1. Introduction

Greater Glasgow Health Board (NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde) is committed to equal opportunities and the promotion of flexible, employee friendly working practices for all employees. By implementing this career break policy the Board aims to create an environment that will allow all employees to utilise their skills, talents and expertise and thereby allow it to both recruit and retain a well-motivated and committed workforce.

The purpose of the career break policy is to allow employees an opportunity to leave their employment on a long-term basis (normally between six months to five years), mainly to undertake further education or to fulfil domestic commitments. The policy will enable employees to keep up to date during their career break and help them return to work at the end of the break.

Arrangements for those participating in Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) or equivalent are different and will be applied as set out in HDL(2006)8.

2. Definition

A career break is special leave without pay for a specified period of time.

3. Purpose

The policy is designed for employees who are currently prevented from remaining in full or part time work but who would like to restart work when circumstances make this possible (e.g. after a course of further education, bringing up children or having cared for a dependant relative). A career break will not be allowed for the purpose of taking up alternative employment.

4. Eligibility

All employees must have a least 12 months' service with the NHS to be eligible to take a career break.

Some examples of where applications could apply are in the context of:

- caring for a dependant relative;
- continuing childcare following a period of maternity leave; or
- undergoing further education and training of benefit to the Service.

Each application will be considered on the merits of the individual case and, where possible, a decision made within 2 weeks following receipt of an application. Full details should be provided in writing to the employee if an application has been rejected or delayed, clearly explaining the reasons for doing so.

5. Duration of Career Break

The maximum period for a career break is five years. An employee may, however, make a number of breaks throughout their employment with the Board provided that the total periods of absence do not exceed five years. A new application must be made for each break requested.

6. Application Procedure

- Employees who wish to apply for the Scheme shall discuss the matter initially with their line manager.
- Applications should then be made in writing. Applications should be made at least three months before starting the proposed break, although in exceptional circumstances management may waive this.
- If approved, the employee shall be issued with appropriate documentation by Human Resources that requires an agreement to abide by the terms and conditions of the career break.
- Managers will be reminded by Human Resources at the end of each financial year of their need to ensure that staff on career breaks have complied with the minimum two weeks' work requirement.
- All documentation in relation to the policy is available from Human Resources.

7. Employee Commitment

7.1 Employees are expected to fulfil the following requirements while on a career break. The purpose of this is to maintain their skills; knowledge and expertise to enable a smooth transition

back to work. In particular s/he is required to: make themselves available to undertake a minimum of two weeks' paid employment per annum, as agreed with their Head of Department.

This may include:

- attending any seminars or meetings to which they are invited by the Board;
- maintaining professional membership or state registration (e.g Nursing & Midwifery Council) where this is required for employment purposes
- keeping knowledge updated by reading relevant professional journals and attending professional meetings, journal clubs etc; and
- attending a minimum number of training sessions, as agreed with the Head of Department to update and refresh their knowledge and skills.

7.2 Employees who participate in the scheme will be obliged to advise their manager of any changes in circumstances, such as home address.

7.3 If the career break lasts for more than one year, employees must notify their manager of their intention to continue the break at least three months prior to the end of each year.

8. Management Commitment

8.1 The Board is committed to ensuring that, as far as is reasonably practicable, employees on a career break shall be offered priority consideration for any post at the same grade and undertaking the same type of work as that undertaken prior to the career break. Employees will be entitled to refuse up to three offers after which the organisation is under no obligation to make any further off

8.2 The Board will guarantee to provide career break participants with at least two weeks' paid employment per year (pro rata for shorter breaks) in order to keep abreast with changes and

developments in the service. This may include training courses and professional updating.

- 8.3 A monthly information pack will be made available to staff on a career break advising of any relevant changes in service conditions, etc.

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 posts of similar grade and responsibility to that held prior to the break, and will take into account the employee's experience, achievements and qualifications.
- 9.2 Three months' notice of an intention to return to work must be given to the line manager concerned. During this period Human Resources will send copies of the internal vacancies bulletin to participants in the scheme.
- 9.3 If, before starting a career break, an employee works in a part time/job share arrangement every effort will be made to allow the employee to return on that basis. However, there is no guarantee that this will always be possible.
- 9.4 To ease the transition back to work the employee may be allowed to return to work on a part-time basis for up to three months before returning to full duties. This must be discussed and agreed with the manager at the time of notifying the employee's wish to return to work.

10. Terms and Conditions of Service

10.1 General Conditions

- 10.1.1 A period of absence on a career break shall not be regarded as a break in service for NHS continuous service purposes, although the break will not itself count as reckonable service. For the purposes of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (as amended) the period of absence will not be regarded as continuous service.

10.1.2 As an employee has continuous employment whilst on a career break, any entitlements accrued prior to the break will not be lost.

10.2 Superannuation

10.2.1 Maintenance of superannuation contributions while on a career break is only possible for employees who are taking a break of one year, or less. As the career break constitutes continuous service, superannuation contributions will be maintained for those on a Career Break of less than one year.

10.2.2 For those employees who take a career break of longer than one year, superannuation contributions will only be deducted in respect of the two weeks per annum (or pro-rated period) that they undertake paid work for the organisation. This will ensure that they remain members of the superannuation scheme during the course of their career break and will be eligible for benefits.

10.2.3 When an employee returns to work following a career break, their superannuation contributions for the unpaid period will be deducted from subsequent pay over a corresponding period. Any tax rebate to which the employee is entitled as a result of their career break may be used to offset superannuation arrears.

10.3 Lease Cars

An employee who is provided with a lease car will be required to return the car to the Car Leasing Section for the period of their career break if it has a scheduled duration of over 12 months.

However, as the full leasing cost of the vehicle will be borne by the employee if it is retained during a career break, they are advised to discuss the matter with a member of the Car Leasing Team prior to embarking upon such a break.

In the event of a lease vehicle being returned, a termination fee may apply.

10.4 Organisational Change

The Organisational Change policy will apply equally to employees on Career Break and, consequently, where redeployment attempts are unsuccessful normal redundancy procedures will apply. Redundancy payments will be calculated in accordance with NHS Terms and Conditions.

10.5 Sick Leave

Employees on a career break are not entitled to receive sick pay except during the two weeks of paid employment that they are required to undertake each year.

10.6 Annual Leave

Employees on a career break will only accrue annual leave for any paid employment carried out for the Board during their career break (as described at 7.1).

10.7 Maternity

A member of staff who discovers that she is pregnant during the course of a Career Break should seek advice from Payroll Department at the earliest opportunity to ensure that she receives appropriate maternity benefits.

11. Monitoring, Review and Evaluation

The application of this Policy will be monitored jointly by the Director of Human Resources and the Area Partnership Forum to ensure equitable treatment of all employees.

The Board is required by Law and under the European Union Employment regulations, to gather monitoring information relating to ethnicity, religion and faith, sexual orientation, age, disability and gender for all aspects of employee relations.

You may be asked for information relating to the above in connection with this policy.

You do not have to give the monitoring information if you do not wish to. However, for some of the above diversity strands it is a legal requirement that we ask you for it, and good practice to ask for monitoring information for all diversity strands.

Any equalities monitoring information will be held separately and not used to inform any proceedings that occur in relation to this Policy.

The operation of this Policy will be regularly reviewed by the Area Partnership Forum to ensure its continued effective operation, and formally no later than 30th June 2009.