# RESEARCH COUNCIL CAREER BREAKS AND SABBATICALS POLICY

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**Policy Statement**

The Research Council endeavours to support employees who wish to take a career break to fulfil domestic responsibilities or take a sabbatical to meet their individual development needs.

The Career Breaks and Sabbaticals Policy and procedures are agreed with the Trade Union Side and comply with legislation.

This policy applies to all employees of the Research Council, (subject to the eligibility criteria). This includes those employed on temporary contracts but excludes Visiting Workers, students or those workers provided by a third party agency.

The UK Shared Business Services Ltd (SBS) provides HR services across the Research Councils. However some employees are deployed at establishments/facilities/ships that do not access services from SBS. In these cases reference to the SBS or System (Employee Self Service) will not apply and employees should refer to their Research Council HR team for assistance.

Whether a worker is deemed to be a worker of employee is not always clear under employment legislation. In cases where managers or individuals have any doubt as to whether the Career Breaks and Sabbaticals Policy and Procedure should apply, advice should be sought from the Research Council HR team.

## 1. Overview

1.1 Employees may wish to apply for an extended period of absence from work for personal reasons (career break) or professional/developmental reasons (sabbatical). More information on each of these is set out below. Employees are advised to discuss the options with their line manager and/or the Research Council HR team.

1.2 Employees may apply to take a career break or sabbatical, which is at the discretion of management.

## 2. Career Breaks

### 2.1 Principles

2.1.1 A career break is an agreed period of unpaid leave of up to five years, while maintaining contact with the Research Council.

2.1.2 Career breaks are not intended for those wishing to move to a role outside the Research Council for a short period to develop their career or to undertake training (see Sabbaticals below or Research Council Transfers and Secondments Policy <link>).

2.1.3 The Research Council may terminate the career break if the employee is found to be working for another employer without consent or due to a change of circumstances on the part of the applicant which may prohibit his/her return to work on the pre-arranged date.

### 2.2 Eligibility

2.2.1 The scheme is open to all employees who have, immediately prior to the commencement of the career break period, a minimum of twelve months' continuous service. Employees will normally be eligible for only one career break during their employment.

### 2.3 Practical arrangements

#### 2.3.1 Length of a Career Break

2.3.1.2The start and end dates of the career break will be agreed in advance. The maximum period is five years. Where a career break follows maternity/adoption/maternity support leave, an employee may take their full entitlement of paid and unpaid maternity leave followed by up to five years' unpaid leave.

2.3.1.2If an employee has a baby/becomes a parent whilst on a career break they will not be eligible for maternity/adoption/maternity support leave or pay. A request from an individual who wishes to return to work prematurely will be considered, taking into account the reasons and the need to be fair and equitable in the treatment of any temporary replacement.

2.3.1.3 Where a career break is agreed for less than five years, the employee may ask for the unpaid leave period to be extended, for example where new domestic responsibilities apply.

### 2.4 Keeping in Touch

2.4.1 The Research Council and the employee will commit to keep in touch during the career break to help ease the employee's eventual return to work. To this end, the Research Council HR team and line management will agree a contact person for the employee and send appropriate literature so that the employee is kept up-to-date on developments/vacancies/news within the organisation.

2.4.2 Employees on career breaks may be asked to undertake up to 10 days' work (either in their normal place of work or at home), or training each year (or the equivalent

number of working hours on a part-time basis), paid at their usual daily rate, so that skill levels and confidence are maintained. The Research Council may contribute towards any extra costs incurred of caring for dependants during any attendance at work or for training.

2.4.3 For more general 'keeping-in-touch' activities, the individual will not receive any pay, but may claim travel costs.

2.4.4 Employees on career breaks will be required to keep in contact with the Research Council and take part in opportunities to maintain familiarity with the work of the organisation wherever possible. The individual will be required to attend a meeting with their line manager and a representative from their Research Council HR team to discuss their return to work.

### 2.5 Return to Work

2.5.1 Employees taking a career break will normally return to a suitable job at their substantive pay band on their return. Where this is not possible, the Research Council redundancy procedure may be implemented. Employees on career breaks will be notified of job opportunities in the three months leading up to their return to work.

2.5.2 Upon return, terms and conditions will be those enjoyed by others in that band and the rate of pay will take account of any general increases to pay ranges which took effect during the career break. Incremental progression will not take place during a period of a career break. This does not preclude variation in the work pattern on return (e.g. part-time), which would be separate to the career break arrangement.

2.5.3 Where a return to work date has not already been agreed, employees must give at least 12 weeks' notice of their intended date of return.

2.5.4 The line manager will consider whether it is possible or necessary to arrange for a special period of retraining or re-familiarisation on return to work.

2.5.5 Any individual who does not return to work at the agreed end date of the career break will be subject to the provisions of the relevant policy (e.g. disciplinary) which may result in termination of employment.

## 3. Sabbaticals

### 3.1 Principles

3.1.1 The Research Council recognises a shared responsibility, in partnership with employees, to assist in the development of individuals. Discussions about the individual development of employees form part of the annual Performance and Development Review (APDR) exercise. Sabbaticals may be utilised by employees to develop their expertise and enrich their overall development.

3.1.2 Sabbaticals are defined as the unpaid absence of a Research Council employee to pursue their wider career development objectives.

### 3.2 Practical Arrangements

3.2.1 The length of a sabbatical will be no longer than one year at the end of which the employee may return to their previous position (if it is still available) or a reasonable suitable alternative. Only in very exceptional circumstances may an extension to this be agreed.

3.2.2 Requests for sabbaticals will be considered by the appropriate Director.

3.2.3 All requests for a sabbatical period will be considered against the Research Council's working needs and will not automatically be approved.

3.2.4 Members of staff who enter into a sabbatical arrangement will be expected to keep in touch with the Research Council and respond to reasonable requests for advice and guidance in their area of expertise as appropriate.

3.2.5 During a period of sabbatical continuity of service will be maintained. However, sabbatical absence does not count as reckonable service for superannuation or redundancy purposes. Employees will be required to agree in writing to the cessation of salary and other contractual benefits for the full duration of the sabbatical. See paragraph 4 below.

### 3.3 Return to Work

3.3.1 Arrangements for an employee's return to work will normally be agreed at the outset of the sabbatical. Where a sabbatical is for less than 12 months, the employee will normally return to the post they were in before. An employee returning from a sabbatical will be reinstated at the same level of pay as that held prior to the initiation of the sabbatical (increased by any general pay increases that have been applied during the period of the sabbatical). Allowances paid to the individual prior to their sabbatical will be resumed where eligibility for payment is retained.

## 4. Effects on terms and conditions

4.1 When an applicant is granted a career break or sabbatical, the period of absence will be regarded as a period of extended unpaid leave. It will not be regarded as creating a break in continuous service for the purposes of statutory provisions. However, the period of absence will not count towards any contractual service-related benefits e.g. pensions, performance pay, sickness absence provisions, maternity/maternity support/ adoption provisions, annual leave and redundancy payments. For these purposes, service before the break will be aggregated with service after the career break.

4.2 During their career break/sabbatical the employee will be subject to the Research Council's policies such as those on notice periods, redundancy, code of conduct etc.

4.3 The detailed effects of an unpaid career break/sabbatical on various conditions of service are as follows:

**Statutory provisions:** continuity of service is maintained in relation to unfair dismissal and redundancy rights. In addition, statutory annual leave continues to accrue but the employee will not be entitled to take/claim payment for statutory annual leave during the period of unpaid absence. They will, however, be entitled to take the statutory annual leave accrued in the leave year in which they return to paid employment with the Council (or, if greater, the pro-rated contractual annual leave [and public & privilege holiday] entitlement for the leave year in which they return).

**Contractual provisions:** a 'stop the clock' principle is operated so that, whilst not accruing contractual benefits, those benefits already accumulated before the career break/sabbatical are preserved and built upon when the individual returns to paid employment. In particular:

**Pensions**: the period of unpaid absence neither qualifies nor reckons for pension purposes. Employees who are thinking about taking a career break/sabbatical are advised to consult their pension provider about the implications for their pension entitlements.

**Performance pay:** where applicable, annual performance review assessments before a period of unpaid absence will be taken into account in considering eligibility for performance pay within the terms of the appropriate pay agreements. However, as noted in para3.3.2, the period of absence will not be treated as service for performance pay purposes.

**Sick Absence:** the period of unpaid absence does not count towards re-qualifying for paid sick absence under the '1 year in 4' rule.

The maximum amount of paid sick absence allowed is 12 months in any period of 4 years.

**Redundancy:** as noted above, continuity of service is maintained for statutory redundancy purposes. However, the career break/sabbatical does not count as reckonable service when calculating contractual compensation payments to employees who leave the Council's employment on redundancy grounds (whether voluntarily or compulsorily). Staff on a career break/sabbatical would be subject to the same redundancy arrangements as other staff e.g. in the event of a general call for redundancy volunteers.

**Maternity/Maternity Support/Adoption Leave:** employees are not eligible for paid maternity etc. leave while they are on a career break/sabbatical.

## 5. Policy Review

5.1 This policy will be regularly reviewed to incorporate any legislation changes. The TU may request that a policy is reviewed.

## 6. Amendment history

| Version | Date | Comments/Changes |
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