



University of Essex



Career Break Policy

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Career Break Policy

1. Overview

- 1.1 A career break is an agreed period of unpaid leave from work to accommodate an employee's individual circumstances/commitments or interests. Career breaks are unpaid and can be for any length of time between three months and two years, it is up to the employee to decide and agree with their line manager. Career breaks give employees the opportunity to take on a new challenge or do something they have always wanted to do whilst remaining employed.

2. Scope and exclusions

- 2.1 The Career Break Policy applies to all permanent and fixed-term employees at the University of Essex. Employees of the University of Essex Campus Services (UECS) or Wivenhoe House Hotel have their own specific policies and procedures. Where there is not a specific UECS policy or procedure the University of Essex policy or procedure will apply.
- 2.2 To be eligible to be considered for a career break an employee must have at least two years of continuous service. Individuals can be employed on either a full-time or part-time basis. If an individual is employed on a fixed-term contract the contract must exceed the duration of the career break.
- 2.3 There is no contractual entitlement to take a career break, and any career break will only be granted at the University's discretion.

3. Reasons for taking a career break

- 3.1 There are many different reasons why an employee may wish to apply for a career break, they may include:
- to care or support a relative, child, partner, neighbour or friend
 - to undertake full-time study
 - to travel or work on a voluntary basis (e.g. to accompany a friend/partner abroad)
 - to visit friends/relatives abroad
 - to spend more time with loved ones

- 3.2 A career break will not be permitted if an employee wishes to take up alternative employment elsewhere which is either on a permanent or fixed-term basis. A career break will also not be permitted if an employee wishes to start a business without prior written agreement from the University
- 3.3 There will be occasions when a career break cannot be accommodated. Reasons, why a career break request may be refused, could include:
- operational demand requires that specific skills are retained or that there is a requirement to continue to manage a key area/project at the University
 - if an employee is subject to capability/disciplinary proceedings
 - the University is unable to secure temporary cover for the role

4. Procedure for considering career break requests

- 4.1 Line managers will always need to consider how operational requirements will be met before agreeing to a career break.
- 4.2 The career break request process is as follows:

Step 1

Discussion with line manager

An employee should have an initial conversation and let their line manager know they are considering a career break. They should let their line manager know how their proposed absence may affect their department, how potential problems may be overcome, the reason for the request, the approximate dates and length of time they wish to take the career break for.




It is important for an employee to have an initial conversation with their line manager so that the line manager is aware of the employee's initial intentions and begin to think about how this would work operationally

Step 2

Complete a career break form and submit

Once an employee has discussed their initial intentions with their line manager they will need to complete a career break form with the detail of the request.




The form should be submitted to the relevant line manager and copied to the Employee Relations Advisory Team. A form should be submitted six months before the intended start date of the career break.

Step 3

Line manager arranges meeting

Once a career break form has been received the employee's line manager will arrange a meeting to discuss the detail of the career break further with them within 10 working days.



A line manager will need to discuss operational requirements with senior managers to decide if a career break will be possible

Step 4

Decision within six weeks – delivered face-to-face and in writing

The employee will be informed of the outcome of their career break request within six weeks of submitting the form to their line manager.

There is no right of appeal, as there is no contractual entitlement to take a career break.

- 4.3 When returning after a career break an initial re-induction process may be agreed and arranged to assist in familiarising an employee with any changes to processes or procedures and help to settle in following a return to the workplace.
- 4.4 More information on other types of unpaid leave can be found in The [Family Leave Policy](#) and [Special Leave Policy](#) (.pdf).

5. Conditions of taking a career break

- 5.1 During a career break an employee will remain an employee and retain continuity of service but will not be entitled to things such as the accrual of annual leave, sick pay or the awarding of annual salary increments. Time spent on a career break will not count towards redundancy calculations. An employee will still have access to their email account and the library.
- 5.2 At least six months' satisfactory service in an employee's grade needs to be achieved upon return to work, before receiving a salary increment. This is because annual salary increments

- are awarded to reflect the development of skills, knowledge, and experience within the role for which an employee is employed and is consistent with other employees joining the University.
- 5.3 Although every attempt will be made, the University cannot guarantee a return to the post occupied prior to a career break. In this event, an alternative role may be offered, in which the terms and conditions are not less favourable.
- 5.4 In the event of a redundancy situation, the original job may no longer be available, and the provisions set out in the University's Managing Structural Change Policy and Redeployment Guidance will be applied.
- 5.5 Once a career break has been agreed upon, an employee will not normally be allowed to return before the agreed date. However, where it is known that circumstances may result in an employee wishing to return earlier than planned (eg. the career break is to care for a seriously ill relative) account will be taken of such factors at the outset to allow as much flexibility as possible to meet an employee's needs and the operational requirements of the University. If an employee wishes to return early, they should give their line manager 8 weeks' notice in a written confirmation of their intention to return to work. A copy should also be sent to staffing@essex.ac.uk.
- 5.6 If an employee is on a longer career break, they are encouraged to maintain contact with their department wherever possible. An agreement on an appropriate means of keeping in touch should be agreed prior to the start date of the career break between the employee and their line manager.
- 5.7 If an employee decides to resign from post during a career break, they must submit a written statement of resignation to their line manager, with a copy to staffing@essex.ac.uk in advance of the agreed return to work date in accordance with their contractual notice period.
- 5.8 An employee will not pay any pension contributions during a career break and the University will not make an Employer contribution either. Membership of the pension scheme will be suspended for the duration of the career break. Employees will be able to maintain death in service and ill-health entitlements by paying a special contribution. For further information, please contact reward@essex.ac.uk. An employee may also want to seek independent financial advice to ensure that they understand any longer-term implications for their pension.
- 5.9 An employee will not be entitled to occupational maternity pay, occupational paternity pay, or occupational shared parental pay whilst on a career break. Entitlement to statutory maternity pay (SMP) may also be affected since SMP is calculated based on an employee's salary 15 weeks before the expected week of childbirth. Please contact staffing@essex.ac.uk for further information about how the rules apply to an employee's particular situation.
- 5.10 If an employee is sponsored, they are entitled to apply for a career break but will stop being sponsored by The University after four weeks of unpaid leave. As such The University will need to withdraw sponsorship and notify the Home Office at the time that the leave of

absence commences. Once the Home Office become aware that The University are no longer sponsoring the employee, they will take steps to curtail the leave, meaning the employee will no longer have the right to work or remain in the UK. Please note that this absence from the UK may impact on an employee's ability to apply for Settlement / Indefinite Leave to Remain in the future. The University is unable to provide employee immigration advice, so they may wish to contact an immigration specialist in this regard.

6. Equality impact assessment

- 6.1 The University has conducted an Equality Impact Assessment on this policy and is satisfied that its application should not result in a differential and negative impact on any groups of employees identified under the Equality Act 2010.

7. Monitoring

- 7.1 The People, Culture and Inclusion Advisory Group (PCIAG) will monitor the impact of this policy.

8. Related University policies and procedures

- [Flexible Working Policy \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Flexible Working Application Form \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Hybrid Principles](#)
- [Equality and Diversity Policy and Strategy](#)
- [Family Leave Policy \(.pdf\)](#)
- [Special Leave Policy \(.pdf\)](#)

9. University sources of information

- [Health and Wellbeing](#)

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