

CAREER BREAKS

INTRODUCTION

Work life balance for Perth & Kinross Council means creating the right balanced environment to enable employees to deliver a quality service. The Council recognises that there may be occasions when flexibility is needed to assist employees taking a break from employment for personal commitment.

Definition and Purpose

A career break is defined as a period of unpaid leave, after which the employee will intend to return to the Council to the same post (or similar post where it is not reasonably practical to return to the same post). In the event of an employee not being able to return to their substantive post, the Council will ensure that suitable alternative employment is offered to the employee. An employee may wish to take a career break to allow them to undertake:

- Carer responsibilities
- Academic Study
- Voluntary Work
- Personal Development

Conditions of the Scheme

The conditions for applying for a career break are as follows:

Application Process

The scheme is available to Chief Officers and Single Status employees who have two years' continuous service with Perth & Kinross Council at the stage of application. Separate national Career Break Terms/Provisions apply to Teaching and Associated Professional employees.

The minimum length of a career break is one year and a maximum length of two years, with the possibility of longer in exceptional circumstances. Requests for career breaks of 6 months may be considered, however this would be at the Service discretion. This length of time excludes maternity, paternity or parental leave.

All requests for career breaks must be made in writing using the Career Break Application Form; this must be submitted at least 6 months prior to the proposed date of commencement, if this is feasible. Requests submitted with less than 6 months' notice may be considered, however this would be at the Service discretion.

In normal circumstances, an employee may have a maximum of two career breaks with a minimum of two years' continuous service between breaks.

Applications for career breaks should be forwarded to the appropriate Line Manager then Head of Service for approval and employees should be given a written response to their request within four weeks of receipt of the application. If the request is refused, the employee will be advised of the grounds for refusal and how to appeal.

Conditions of Service

A career break is not considered a break in service for the purposes of unfair dismissal and redundancy as the employee is not required to resign.

During a career break, employees will not accrue any annual leave entitlement.

On returning from a career break, where possible an employee will return to the post held prior to the career break on the same grade and spinal column point, subject to any organisational or Service restructuring. If this is not practical, the employee will be offered suitable alternative employment as described in the Framework for Managing Workforce Changes.

For employees who are not at the top of their salary scale at the commencement of their career break, further incremental progression will resume in line with Perth & Kinross Council's Conditions of Service.

Eligibility for occupational sick pay will resume, based on the employee's continuous local authority service, i.e. the duration of the career break itself is excluded when calculating occupational sick pay but service before and after the career break is counted.

Career breaks may be linked onto the end of a period of maternity leave, however employees who choose to take a career break following the end of their unpaid Additional Maternity Leave and have received payment of 50% of their salary during this period, will be required to return to work for the 3 month period prior to the commencement of the career break.

If an employee decides to withdraw their application, they should advise their Line Manager in writing, as soon as possible. Withdrawal of a request, once agreed and fully approved, will only be granted in exceptional circumstances. This must be agreed by the Head of Service in conjunction with Human Resources. Where possible, an employee will return to their original post, however this may not be feasible for the duration of the agreed career break period, if the recruitment process has already been completed. This will be determined by the Head of Service.

Maintaining Contact

It is essential that employees and managers keep in contact during the duration of a career break. This ensures that employees are kept up-to-date with changes at their base (to job, team or Service) and business developments and also demonstrates a commitment by the employee to eventually return on a permanent basis.

Where any reviews or restructures are being completed within Services which could affect the employee's post, the Line Manager must ensure that the employee is

included within all consultation exercises, including the issue of letters etc. Further advice can be obtained from Human Resources.

Employees will be required to undertake a minimum period of 5 days' work (pro-rata for part-time employees) per year of their career break, known as "contact periods"; these can be completed individually or in a block. Employees will be paid for contact periods at the rate equal to the same spinal column/scale point prior to going on the career break. When arranging contact periods, Line Managers should be aware that employees may need sufficient notice.

In addition, Line Managers should ensure employees are kept up-to-date with relevant information - this can be a mixture of staff newsletters, professional journals, briefing notes and notification of social events. The employee will be expected to keep HR Services up-to-date with current contact details at HR@pkc.gov.uk.

Other Employment

Employees who are on a career break will not normally be allowed to undertake any full-time paid employment in the UK or abroad. However, the Council will consider applications for secondary employment where this would normally provide earnings to supplement an employee's salary. If an employee engages in secondary employment, or is in receipt of benefits during the career break, they should seek advice from HM Revenue and Customs regarding personal taxation.

Working arrangement on return from a Career Break

An employee must give a minimum of 3 months' written notice confirming the exact date they intend to return to work. An early return to work (prior to the date originally agreed for the career break to end) will only be agreed in exceptional circumstances; this will be at the discretion of the Manager/Head of Service.

Extension to a Career Break

Any extension to a career break must be agreed by an employee's Manager/Head of Service and must not exceed the 2 year maximum (unless in exceptional circumstances.)

Pension Implications

Please note that Local Government Pension Scheme payments will not be made if you are on a period of authorised unpaid leave. If you are in the 50/50 section of the LGPS and you go onto authorised unpaid leave, you will be placed in the main section of the LGPS from the beginning of the next pay period.

If your authorised unpaid leave lasts less than 31 days, your member contributions will be deducted as normal from your salary in that calendar month and the relevant employer's contributions will be paid. There is no need for you to complete any paperwork.

If your authorised unpaid leave lasts more than 30 days, you have the option to buy back any lost pension when you return to work. You must submit a signed [Election Form](#) and send it to HR Services at HR@pkc.gov.uk. If you complete this process within 30 calendar days of your 'return to work' date, Perth & Kinross Council will contribute to the cost of missed pension contributions, with the split being $\frac{1}{3}$ employee, $\frac{2}{3}$ employer. Your 'return to work' date for this purpose is the first working day after the period of unpaid leave so it is important that you act early to benefit from the cost sharing provision. To start this process, please read the [guidance notes](#) and send the completed [Additional Pension Contribution Form](#) to the Payroll and Reward Team at PayrollandReward@pkc.gov.uk

It is possible to complete this process outwith the 30 calendar day period, however no contribution will be made by Perth & Kinross Council, resulting in you being liable for the full amount. There is a maximum timeframe of 3 years for missed pensions to be repaid.