



Workforce

Career Break Policy: guide for employees

This guide will help employees to understand the process to be followed when making an application for a career break. It also covers the implications of a career break for employees and useful information to consider if approving or declining an application.

The following guide forms part of the standard for workforce policies. These policies apply to all eligible staff within NHSScotland, regardless of the board they are employed by.

NHSScotland wants to create an inclusive workplace where employees can thrive and feel confident about their ability to balance their personal and professional responsibilities.

It is recognised that policies to support this are particularly important in NHSScotland given the predominantly female workforce who largely take on primary caring roles within the family. The guide covers the following:

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What is the purpose of the Career Break Policy?

A career break is a flexible working option. It can support employees at various times in their lives and their employment journey. The intent behind the policy is to support employees with their work-life balance commitments or personal development opportunities on a longer-term basis. It also has the potential to benefit the organisation due to the additional skills and experience employees may gain during their career break.

Who is covered by this policy?

The career break policy applies to you if you have at least 12 months continuous service with one or more NHS employers. Bank and agency staff are not eligible for a career break.

Reasons for a career break

You may request a career break for a variety of reasons, including the following:

- caring for a dependant
- continuing childcare following a period of maternity or adoption leave
- education and training
- voluntary work
- [NHS Global Citizenship participation](#)

Alternative employment

A career break should not be used to take up alternative employment. However, alternative employment may be appropriate in some circumstances, depending on the reason for the career break. For example:

- moving abroad for a fixed period
- undertaking bank work to maintain clinical skills
- work while undertaking further education to achieve professional qualifications

Requesting a career break for the purposes of alternative employment which conflicts with your substantive post or NHSScotland's principles and values will not be approved. You should discuss any planned alternative employment before or during your career break with your manager when making your application.

If your circumstances change during your career break, you should contact your manager at the earliest opportunity. You should also discuss the implications of a career break on your secondary employment.

Request for a career break

The first step in any application for a career break should be early informal discussions with your manager. These should include the following:

- your eligibility
- your reasons, needs, and rationale for your career break application, as [a flexible working option may be more appropriate](#)

The maximum timeframe a career break can last is 5 years across all NHS employment.

If you are currently under UK immigration control, contact human resources to discuss how a career break may impact your visa conditions.

Application

If you decide to proceed with a career break application, you should give at least 3 months' notice. You must submit your request in writing using the [Career break application form](#). If you give less than 3 months' notice, your manager may still apply this policy if appropriate cover can be arranged.

Once your manager has received your completed form, they should:

- acknowledge receipt of the application within 7 days
- arrange a discussion with you within 28 days of receipt

Timescales can be extended by mutual agreement.

Meeting

The meeting is an opportunity to discuss the following:

- feasibility of a career break
- reasons or rationale for your career break request
- contractual implications for you how you propose to maintain your professional registration, if applicable
- proposed means and frequency of keeping in touch
- requirement for you to keep your contact details up to date
- the option of keeping in touch (KIT) days
- signpost to the Scottish Public Pensions Agency (SPPA) to discuss pension implications whilst on career break
- implications on any salary sacrifice schemes
- any intentions of undertaking alternate work during the career break

You should be aware that it is not guaranteed that there will be a post available for you at the end of your career break. However, every effort will be made to identify a suitable alternative post for you to return to using the redeployment process.

Management considerations

When considering a career break request, your manager should make sure each request is considered in a person-centred way and on its own merits. They should not automatically approve or decline a request. They should assess the needs of the post, the service, and colleagues, taking current and future workforce requirements into account. They will also consider:

- ability to backfill the post on a temporary basis
- specialist skills and experience of the role
- turnover in the department
- absence within the department
- planned service redesigns and the timing of these

Career break less than 12 months

If you intend to return within 12 months, you will return to the same job as far as reasonably possible.

Career break more than 12 months

If you request a career break of more than one year, the organisation will make every effort to place you in a post at the same grade and level of responsibility that you held before starting your career break. Your manager will also start the redeployment process 3 months before you are due to return to allow you every opportunity to find a suitable alternative post.

You may request an extension of your original application with three months' notice to allow your manager time to arrange further cover. Where there is less than 3 months' notice given, your manager should accommodate an early return to work if they can.

Contractual issues

Sick leave

In the early stages of a career break, you may be entitled to statutory sick pay if you are unwell and meet the earnings threshold. To qualify for any such benefits, you need to notify your manager that you are unwell. You are not entitled to occupational sick pay.

Maternity leave

If you become pregnant during your career break, you will be entitled to access maternity leave and potentially statutory or occupational maternity pay. To do so, you would need to end your break and start maternity leave.

Pension contributions

Through a career break, you can still participate in the NHS pension scheme for a time-limited period. Further information is available on the [SPPA website](#).

Professional registration

You are required to maintain your professional registration during a career break as you continue to be employed by the organisation. It is up to you to consider how you will maintain your professional competence. However, career break provisions can support you in doing so through access to KIT days and bank work.

Reckonable service

Whilst on a career break, your reckonable service is paused for service-related benefits such as incremental credit, sick pay, redundancy, and annual leave entitlements. KIT days worked count for additional service.

This means that when you return your incremental point, annual leave and sick pay entitlements will be the same as they were before your break.

Salary sacrifice schemes

You are not entitled to access certain benefits of employment which would have applied had you not been absent. Examples include:

- Cycle to Work scheme
- credit union arrangement

You should seek advice from the payroll department regarding the implications of any arrangements you have in place before making your application.

Organisational change

If an organisational change process commences that affects your substantive post whilst you are on a career break, your manager must notify and discuss this with you. You must also be given the opportunity to be considered within the cohort for any posts you may be eligible for. If you indicate that you do not wish to be considered, this may affect the scope for a post at the end of your career break. If your substantive post no longer exists, you may be considered to be redundant.

Career break request approved

If your manager approves your request for a career break, you and your manager should complete the [Career break agreement](#). This will detail the duration of the career break and must be signed by both you and your manager.

Your manager must make sure that all relevant systems and payroll are updated on this change. All equipment should be returned to your manager before you start your career break.

Career break declined

If your manager is unable to approve your career break request, they must detail their rationale in writing within 7 days of your meeting with them. Any rationale for declining the request must be based on fact and supported with evidence.

Appeal process

You have the right to appeal the decision to reject the application or any request to change the length of the career break within 14 calendar days of receiving the outcome. You must provide the reason for your appeal in writing.

It would normally be your manager's manager who will hear the appeal, supported by an HR adviser who has not been involved in the process to date. They will inform you that your appeal has been received.

The appeal panel will consider:

- the reasons your manager gave for refusing the request
- any alternative options explored
- other points discussed and documented in the outcome letter

The Chair will make sure you and your manager are advised in writing of the arrangements no later than 14 calendar days before the hearing.

Your manager will be asked to provide a written statement detailing their considerations and decision. If you have not provided your statement of case when you lodged your appeal, you should provide this also. These documents should be submitted no later than 7 calendar days before the appeal hearing. They will be shared with all other parties.

Appeal outcome

Following the hearing, the Chair will write to all parties with the outcome of the appeal hearing. The letter will be issued within 7 calendar days following the appeal hearing.

If the appeal is successful, the outcome letter will specify the agreed changes and the date these will take effect.

Where the appeal is unsuccessful, the outcome letter will provide a clear and detailed explanation of the reasons for the decision. The outcome of the appeal will be final.

Your manager is responsible for completing the appropriate paperwork to instruct any changes, including a signed Career break agreement, should the rejection of your application be overturned.

Returning to work

You should plan your return to work in advance with your manager.

If you are returning to your former post, the plan should include arrangements for equipment, systems access, and any major changes you need to be aware of. It may be appropriate to have a period of induction to support your reintegration into the workplace.

If your break has been for more than twelve months, your manager should arrange to meet with you 4 months before your return date to discuss the next steps and complete any redeployment paperwork to ensure you are considered for any suitable posts in the 3 months leading up to your return. If a post does not become available within that time, this should be managed in line with the redeployment policy.

You may wish to be supported back to work on a phased basis, or you may wish to review your working pattern. A phased return will be paid in line with the hours you worked. If you want to alter your working pattern, you should refer to the [Flexible Work Pattern Policy](#).

You should have agreed contact with your manager during your career break. It is important to maintain contact, especially in the months leading up to your return. If your manager doesn't hear from you, they will contact you to advise you that your career break is about to end and make arrangements for your return.

If you do not maintain contact or engage with your manager, this may give the impression that you do not wish to return or that you have resigned. Ultimately, this may result in the termination of your contract.