

Career Break

Purpose

1. The University is committed to Equal Opportunities and the provision of practices that support work-life balance. In support of this, the University shall operate a Career Break Scheme in line with the details below. The scheme offers staff of the University the opportunity to take a planned period of time off work either on a full time or part time basis to concentrate on alternative personal priorities.
2. The primary purpose is to offer staff the flexibility to more easily combine family commitments with their work at Middlesex University, but this extends to other personal commitments, such as a period of travel or voluntary work. Through this, it is anticipated that commitment, motivation and morale of staff may be enhanced and that valued experienced staff may be retained who may otherwise leave to satisfy such priorities.

Eligibility

3. All staff with permanent contracts, both full and part time, are eligible to apply for a career break as part of this scheme as follows:

Length of Service at commencement of career break:	Maximum length of career break:
1 year	1 year
2 years	2 years
3 years	3 years
4 years	4 years
5 or more years	5 years

This policy is not designed to cover secondments to another university or similar institution.

4. **Part-time break:** A career break may be full or part-time. For example, some staff, particularly returning mothers, may seek to return on a part-time basis for a planned period of time before returning on their previous full-time basis or reduce their existing hours for such a period.
5. **Acceptance:** Acceptance of an individual's request to take a career break shall be at the discretion of the line manager and with the ultimate approval of the line Management Team manager. The decision shall be based on consideration of:
 - the operational impact on the School/Service of the career break and its length;
 - the purpose of the career break fulfilling the intended purpose, as specified above; and

- the individual's performance, which must at least reach the standard required to undertake their job effectively.

Acceptance shall not be unreasonably withheld, and where an application may be turned down, this shall be discussed with the line Management Team manager and Human Resource Services prior to a final decision being made. All decisions shall be based on sound, objective reasons.

6. Part-time acceptance: In the case of a part-time career break, consideration shall also be given to whether it is possible to make reasonable arrangements to cover an individual's post with them returning/commencing on a part-time basis. Again, acceptance shall not be unreasonably withheld.

7. When a request for a career break is received, the line manager shall give full consideration to the operational impact of agreeing to the request and to the length of the career break. All decisions shall be based on sound, objective reasons.

8. Where the career break is agreed, the associated vacancy will normally be filled temporarily, (or the work temporarily covered), either by:

- a) arranging for another member of staff to act up into the post in accordance with University's procedures;
- b) filling the post on a fixed-term basis for the duration of the career break; or
- c) covering the post within existing resources.

9. The individual shall return to, or increase their hours in their existing post (or cover existing work), taking account of any organisational changes (including any change of location) that may occur during the period of the career break.

10. Employees shall not undertake any type of paid employment during a career break, doing so may be considered to be a breach of contract which may result in termination of employment. If an employee already has secondary employment with another employer and intends to continue working in this post during a career break, this should be brought to the line manager's attention.

Contractual Issues

11. Employment: Employment is regarded as continuing for the specified duration of the break but contractual entitlements and benefits will cease to accrue or apply except for the following terms which will be binding on the employee and the University:

- Notice periods;
- Compliance with the Data Protection Regulations;
- Obligation to work exclusively for the University;
- The University's disciplinary and grievance procedures;
- The University will be bound by its obligation to preserve trust and confidence while the employee will be bound by his/her duty of good faith towards the University.

An individual is unlikely to be eligible for Unemployment Benefit. Individuals are advised to seek information regarding such issues as benefits and National Insurance contributions direct from their local Benefits Office.

12. Continuity of employment will be preserved during the career break. On returning from a career break, an employee's service prior to the career break will count as part of his or her period of continuous employment.

13. Return to post: The individual's post will normally be temporarily filled (or the work temporarily covered) until the individual returns to (or increases hours in) his/her post on the specified date. This shall be on the same conditions that s/he left, taking account of any organisational changes (including any change of location) that may occur during the period of the career break.

14. Part-time: In the case of a part-time career break, the individual shall receive contractual entitlements on a pro-rata basis in accordance with their entitlements as a part-time employee.

15. Pension: Individuals wishing to make alternative pension arrangements during the period of their career break shall explore this directly with their pensions agency (Teachers Pensions for academic staff, including some senior managers) and London Borough of Barnet for APT&C and manual staff and senior managers).

Maintaining Contact

16. During a career break individuals are required to maintain contact with their office. This shall normally take the form of a minimum of two briefing meetings per year with their line manager and colleagues as appropriate, at six monthly intervals. Individuals are also required to keep abreast of relevant current developments in their academic or professional field, where this is appropriate, and general University developments.

17. The line manager shall take responsibility for ensuring appropriate and purposeful contact is maintained with the individual during his/her career break. This will include: ensuring the briefing meetings referred to above are planned, occur and are effective; forwarding relevant University briefing papers to the individual; and taking steps to support the individual's efforts to keep abreast of relevant current developments.

18. The individual shall also be encouraged to attend relevant social events wherever possible.

19. The University may bring the career break to end where an individual has failed to maintain contact, following a written warning and reasonable opportunity for explanation. Where the decision is taken to end the career break and the individual does not return to work, para 23 shall apply.

Confirmation of return

20. For career breaks of one year or more, individuals are required to indicate in writing their intention to return on the specified date six months in advance of that date, and contractually to confirm this three months before the specified return date. This also applies to staff completing a part time career break. Where the career break is less than a year, individuals are required contractually to confirm their return two months before the specified return date.

21. Should the individual wish to extend a career break beyond the specified date, s/he shall discuss this with the line manager at the time, in line with the policy details above. Similarly, should the individual wish to shorten a career break and return prior to the specified return date, s/he shall discuss this with the line manager. Every reasonable effort should be made to accommodate such a change in plans, given the commitments and alternative arrangements made to cover the career break. The career break cannot normally be extended beyond the maximum length of the career break to which the individual is eligible based on their length of service.

22. Resignation: If an individual subsequently chooses not to continue in employment with the University, notice is required to be given in accordance with appropriate conditions of service.

23. Failure to return: Where an individual fails to confirm their intention to return to work on the specified date or where a request to extend the career break is not agreed and/or s/he then fails to return on that date s/he will receive a written warning that they are in serious breach of their contract of employment. Following reasonable opportunity for explanation, the employment contract shall be terminated summarily, without notice. The reason for the termination of the contract shall normally be based on some other substantial reason.

24. Equal treatment: In the case of reorganisation, redeployment, relocation and possible redundancy of operations, an affected individual on a career break shall be treated in the same way as other individuals in the area not on such a break as far as is practical and, as such, an individual shall not be advantaged nor disadvantaged for being so absent.

Procedures

25. An individual shall contact their line manager in the first instance with their request to take a career break, providing the appropriate details (such as length of time, dates) and normally give three months' notice of their wish to take a career break.

26. The line manager shall assess the request in line with the Career Break Policy and shall make a recommendation to the line Management Team manager.

27. The line manager shall discuss cases that may be turned down with the line Management Team manager or line Director and Human Resource Services prior to a final decision being made.

28. The individual's manager shall notify him/her of the decision, normally one month before the requested date, including a written explanation in cases that are not accepted.

29. Human Resource Services shall be notified of accepted cases with details and written authorisation from the line Management Team manager, using the Career Break proforma (available from the Intranet). A revised contract shall be issued for the individual to sign as her/his acceptance.

30. The line manager shall make appropriate arrangements to cover the individual's absence on a career break in line with usual University policy and practice and shall establish and undertake arrangements with the individual to keep them informed and involved in accordance with the Career Break Policy.

31. The individual shall confirm to their line manager and Human Resource Services their intention to return on the specified date three months before that date (or two months if the break is for less than one year).

*This policy was agreed in principle by Management Team at its meeting on 18 September 1995 and adopted by the University following consultation with the Trades Unions in February 1996. It was reviewed in 2001, following consultation with Management Team and the recognised Trade Unions, and approved by Executive Team on 25 April 2002. It is due for review in April 2007. **It was agreed at the Joint Unions Consultative and Negotiating Committee on 29 November 2006 to defer the review for one year.***