



Queen Margaret University
EDINBURGH

Career Break Policy and Procedure

Policy Summary:	The Career Break Policy and Procedure provides guidance on career break leave arrangements within QMU.
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1.0 Aims and Objectives

The aim of this policy is to provide managers and staff with guidance on career break leave arrangements to ensure that these are undertaken fairly and consistently across Queen Margaret University and in accordance with equality and diversity principles.

2.0 Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to all cases of career break leave within Queen Margaret University.

3.0 Monitor and Review

Human Resources is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of this policy and supporting procedures and will conduct reviews at appropriate intervals.

Any individual who feels they have been unfairly treated or discriminated against as part of secondment arrangements should contact Human Resources.

4.0 Equal Opportunities

Queen Margaret University is committed to equality of opportunity for all staff and it is the responsibility of all QMU employees to promote “equality and diversity” in the application of this policy ensuring that there is no discrimination on the grounds of disability, race/ethnic origin, sex/gender, age, religion, marital/family status, dependency, sexual orientation, political opinion, and economic or social status.

5.0 Responsibility for this Policy

Human Resources.

Any changes to this policy and supporting procedures will be made in consultation with appropriate bodies.

QMU reserves the right to update HR Policies in line with new or updated Employment Legislation.

6.0 Definition of Career Break Leave

A career break is defined as when an employee may wish to take an extended break from work for a variety of personal reasons such as family commitments, responsibilities or interests.

A career break is unpaid.

QMU is committed to supporting the work-life balance of employees and recognises that there are sometimes circumstances where it may be beneficial to allow employees an unpaid period of time away from work.

7.0 Scope and Purpose of Career Break Leave

Career breaks are normally undertaken to pursue personal interests or personal development.

Examples of uses of Career Break include:

- Care of children or other dependants.
- Personal study, training or development (normally relevant to the employee's role at QMU).
- Undertaking a personal project.
- Overseas travel, for example, visiting family or countries.

Academic employees who wish to take leave for a purpose which is directly linked to their objectives and the School's operational plan should refer to the QMU Sabbatical Leave Policy.

Career break leave should be used exclusively for the purpose for which it has been granted and must not be used to undertake any other paid employment except without the express permission of QMU, to avoid any conflicts of interest.

Where applicable, career break leave must be taken in accordance with UKVI regulations.

8.0 Duration of Career Break Leave

A career break will normally last between three months and two years. In exceptional circumstances, where this is mutually agreed by the employee and their line manager, it may be possible for a career break to be less than three months or more than two years.

9.0 Eligibility

Taking a career break is not an automatic right of the employee. Employees are eligible to apply for a career break after two years of continuous service.

The decision on granting career break leave will take into account the following factors (this is not an exhaustive list):

- The purpose of the career break
- The length of time of the career break
- Ability to cover/backfill the employee's post
- The need to retain the employee's skills, knowledge and experience within the Department or School.
- The forthcoming operational needs of the Department or School
- The employee's length of service and duration of contract
- Potential benefits for the employee and/or Department or School

Career break leave may be granted on more than one occasion during the course of employment, depending on the purpose and length of the career break. Following a period of career break leave, an employee must have returned to their substantive post for a period of at least two years before they are eligible to make a request for a new period of career break leave. Employees must follow the Application Procedure as documented in 10.0 for all requests for periods of career break leave.

There may be instances where a career break is not the most appropriate method of granting leave to an employee. The line manager and employee should refer to Human Resources or the HR Intranet page for advice and guidance on other types of leave.

10.0 Application Procedure

Employees should provide as much notice as possible of their intention to request a career break and not less than six months before they would like their career break to commence.

Proposals for career break leave may occasionally arise from PER discussions between the employee and their line manager.

Where an employee is considering an application for a career break, they should discuss this with their line manager in the first instance. The line manager should indicate the viability of the proposal for which the career break is sought.

Employees must not commit themselves to plans prior to their application being formally approved.

Where the employee wishes to go ahead with their request for a career break, they should complete the Career Break Leave Application Form (Appendix 1) and submit this to their line manager.

If appropriate the line manager should arrange a meeting with the employee and the Head of Department/Dean of School to discuss the circumstances of the career break. Consideration should be given to the purpose of the leave, the duration of the leave, the operational requirements of the department or school, cover required for the employee and any other relevant factors.

The Head of Department/Dean of School may need to take into account the number of staff away on leave at any point in time. The Head of Department/Dean of School may also need to seek agreement from the Vacancy Approval Panel that cover for the career break may be recruited before they are able to confirm approval of an application for a career break.

When the Head of Department/Dean of School has decided to approve a request for a career break, they should complete the Career Break Application Form and forward this to Human Resources. Human Resources will write to the employee confirming arrangements for their career break leave.

11.0 Terms and Conditions of Employment

Career breaks are unpaid.

A career break will not be regarded as a break in service but rather as a period of unpaid leave. The employment contract will continue for the period of the career break, but with no entitlement to pay or pay related benefits. Other contractual entitlements as set out in the employee's terms and conditions remain in place. There will be no entitlement to sick pay or holiday pay while on a career break. Employees will not accrue annual leave while on a career break.

The period of the career break will not count towards service related benefits, for example, entitlement to occupational sick pay. For these purposes service before the career break will be aggregated with service following the career break.

Normal incremental progression on the salary scale will be suspended during the period of the career break and will recommence upon return to work. Upon return to work, the employee's salary will be adjusted to reflect any cost of living rises that are applicable to them.

Employees must not undertake any other paid employment while on a career break without the express permission of QMU, to avoid any conflicts of interest.

Where an employee becomes pregnant during the period of their career break, their career break will be superseded by the Maternity Leave Policy. Career break leave may also be superseded by the Paternity Leave Policy where appropriate. Employees are advised to note that entitlement to Statutory Maternity Pay may be affected by career break leave. It is recommended that employees seek advice from Human Resources or Payroll in relation to this.

Employees who are on a career break are entitled to apply for vacancies which arise within QMU, however, it should be noted that, if an application is successful, their career break will not necessarily be transferred to the new position and the employee may be required to return to work at QMU to commence the new post.

Employees are advised to check their own entitlement to Social Security benefits and payment of NI contributions while on career break leave.

12.0 Maintaining Contact

HR encourages the line manager and employee to keep in touch during the career break leave period. Employees and line managers may find it helpful to discuss the amount of contact they wish with each other prior to the employee commencing the career break. Suitable methods of contact, e.g. telephone, email, etc, should be confirmed. They should also discuss reasons for making contact, e.g. to keep the employee informed of team developments, consultation on organisational changes, etc.

An employee who is on a career break is expected to keep up to date with significant developments in their field of work and to maintain appropriate professional links.

On mutual agreement between the employee and the line manager, the employee may attend work during their career break leave, for example to attend mandatory training.

13.0 Resignation

If an employee decides to resign from their employment during a period of career break leave then their normal notice period will remain applicable.

14.0 Return to Work

HR will write to the employee one month prior to their proposed date of return requesting that the employee completes the "Return to Work after Career Break Form". This will enable HR and Payroll to make any necessary adjustments to the employee's salary should they decide to amend their return date.

Planning for the employee's return to work should ideally commence no later than four weeks before the date of return. If the employee has been absent for a significant period of time then re-induction and re-training may need to be considered, especially if significant changes have occurred within the School/Department in their absence.

The employee will be entitled to return to their former post at QMU. Where a re-organisation or restructure has taken place attempts will be made to fully consult with the employee on a career break, however, any difficulties experienced in making contact with the employee should not delay any decision making.

Where an employee wishes to return from a period of career break leave earlier than planned, they should inform their line manager at the earliest opportunity and, where possible, at least three months before the date on which they wish to return.

If an employee is not able to return to work on the agreed date due to ill-health, then QMU's normal sickness absence reporting procedures must apply.

15.0 Extensions to Career Break Leave

When an employee wishes to apply for an extension to their career break leave, they should inform their line manager as soon as possible. Applications to extend career break leave will principally follow the same procedure as the original request, with capacity for the department to sustain an extension being the primary focus.

16.0 Payment of Pension Contributions

Where an employee elects to take a period of unpaid career break leave both they and QMU will cease to pay pension contributions. This period of time will not count as pensionable service. The employee must decide when returning to work if they wish to make up the difference and pay back their unpaid contributions so that this period will count as pensionable service again.

Employees who are considering a career break should obtain further details on pension contributions from their pension provider, contact details of which are provided below:

Lothian Pension Fund: <http://www.lpf.org.uk/>
STSS: http://www.sppa.gov.uk/scot_teachers/home.htm
USS: <http://www.usshq.co.uk/>



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Appendix 1
Career Break Leave Application Form

Name	
School/Dept/Centre	
Proposed Start Date of Career Break	
Proposed End Date of Career Break	
Purpose of Career Break	
Please provide dates of any previous career breaks during the course of employment at QMU	
Signature of Applicant:	
Date:	

Authorisation			
Line Manager		Date	
Head of Department/Dean of School		Date	
HR Signature		Date	



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Appendix 2
Return to Work after
Career Break Leave Form

Employee Details

Employee Name	
Department/School	

Return to Work Details

I intend to return to work at the end of my Career Break Leave	Yes/No
Last day of Career Break Leave (This is the day before your full salary should be reinstated)	
I intend to use annual leave to delay my return to work or to facilitate a phased return to work	Yes/No
Details of use of accrued annual leave	
Return Date (This is the date you will be back "in the office")	
Details of return to work induction required	

Declaration

Employee Signature		Date	
Head of Department/School Signature		Date	