



## **CAREER BREAKS**

**1.0** The objective of the career break scheme is to facilitate employees who wish to take a break away from work.

### **2.0 Purpose**

2.1 A career break may be granted for most purposes including further education, domestic responsibilities or to work outside Northern Ireland. A career break will not be granted for the purpose of taking up alternative salaried or wage earning employment within Northern Ireland.

2.2 An employee who is granted a career break for the purpose of further education will be permitted to take up salaried or wage earning employment on a casual basis during holidays etc. or to work during a student placement.

### **3.0 Eligibility**

3.1 The granting of a career break is a discretionary matter and not an entitlement. Each application will be considered on its own individual merits and in light of the circumstances which prevail in the particular department and in the given grade/specialism to which the applicant belongs. Career breaks may, therefore, have to be refused or delayed where there are overriding business considerations or where they may cause a detriment to the service. Reasons for refusal will be given and conveyed to the applicant in writing.

To be eligible to be considered for a career break staff must:

- be a permanent Council employee
  - have completed at least 5 years service with Antrim Borough Council. Service with other public authorities will not count toward the 5 year service
  - have a satisfactory record of attendance, performance and conduct
- 3.2 An employee who is subject to disciplinary or inefficiency procedures will not normally be permitted to take a career break until his/her standard of service/performance reaches a satisfactory level.



#### **4.0 Duration and Number of Career Breaks**

- 4.1 Special Leave without pay in the form of a career break may be granted for any period ranging from one year to a maximum of three years at Council's discretion. One extension of one year may be granted to the original period of a career break provided that the career break inclusive of the extension, does not exceed three years in total. A career break may not extend beyond the employee's minimum statutory retirement age.
- 4.2 Employees will normally be eligible for only one career break during their employment with the Council.

#### **5.0 Applications**

- 5.1 At least three months' notice must be given of the prospective start date for a career break, unless circumstances make this impossible. The actual start date of a career break will be a management decision taking into account, among other things, the circumstances of the application and the timescale for filling any resulting vacancy.
- 5.2 Employees on a career break should provide the Council's Human Resources Department, with and regularly update a forwarding address.
- 5.3 A request for a career break should be submitted in writing using the Official application form to the Human Resources Officer, through the employee's Line Management and relevant Director, detailing the reason for the career break and the proposed duration.
- 5.4 Once approval to leave under the scheme is recommended by management and granted by the appropriate Committee and Council, the details of the scheme as they apply to the employee will be confirmed in writing. Employees must sign to indicate that they have read, understood and agree to be bound by the rules of this scheme.
- 5.5 An applicant who is not granted a career break will be advised in writing of the reason for the refusal and may subsequently raise the matter in accordance with the established grievance procedure. Any appeal must be made within one month following notification of refusal.

#### **6.0 Conditions of Service**

- 6.1 Employees who are granted a career break are required to take whatever annual leave is due to them before the career break begins. Any outstanding leave not taken will be forfeited. Wherever possible, therefore, the last day of attendance should be fixed to take account of any untaken leave.



- 6.2 Special leave without pay does not count as service towards pay, pensions, sick leave or annual leave. A 'stop the clock' principle is applied in that unpaid leave does not accrue benefits, but those already accumulated are preserved until the employee returns to paid employment. Employees are advised to seek independent advice from sources such as NILGOS, Inland Revenue, Social Security Agency and a Professional Financial Advisor about the implications of a career break on issues such as pay, pensions etc. before applying for a career break. Council will not accept any liability for erosion of pension entitlement or any other loss incurred by the employee as a result of the career break.
- 6.3 Should general Terms & Conditions change for employees during the period of the Career break the employee will be expected to sign new Terms & Conditions prior to resuming paid employment with the Council.
- 6.4 In a redundancy or early severance situation those on a career break will be considered under the same terms as all other employees.

## **7.0 Social Security and Inland Revenue Arrangements**

- 7.1 Employees who are permitted to take up any form of employment while on unpaid leave should contact their local office of the Inland Revenue.
- 7.2 It is the responsibility of the individual employee to contact the Social Security Agency to determine whether they are entitled to any Social Security benefits and to check the position as regards National Insurance contributions.

## **8.0 Return to Work**

- 8.1 Employees on a career break must contact the Human Resources Department in writing at least three months before they are due to return to work in order to:
- confirm that they intend to return on the due date
  - apply for an extension (subject to the maximum total not exceeding 3 years in total)
  - indicate that they wish to resign
- 8.2 An employee may not on some occasions be posted back to his/her former post/location, (this situation may arise due to a wide range of circumstances outside Council's control including Local Government re-organisation and restructuring) but to vacancies as and when they arise. Every effort will be made to ensure that they return to a post within their previous grade/pay range, although employees may be required to work in a lower grade post on a temporary basis until a suitable post in the previous grade can be found. Pay



would relate to the previous grade initially, but would be on a mark-time basis until a suitable vacancy is available.

- 8.3 Where a suitable post is not available the employee may, with the agreement of the Human Resources Department, take up alternative salaried or wage earning employment within Northern Ireland, on a temporary basis, until a suitable post becomes available either in the previous grade level or the lower grade.
- 8.4 On return to work, the employee's pay will be assessed and calculated by where the individual was on the scale in relation to the maximum of the scale i.e. the employee will resume on the scale point of the salary scale which applied immediately before the career break began.
- 8.5 If an employee wishes to return early from a career break due to unforeseen circumstances he/she must give three months' notice in writing. However, there is no guarantee that a post will be available earlier than the date originally agreed.
- 8.6 An employee returning from a career break who refuses three reasonable job offers may be dismissed from the Council's employment.

#### **9.0 Absence Due to Illness After a Career Break**

- 9.1 An employee who is unable to return to work on the due date because of illness will be required to produce a medical statement promptly. It is important that the statement covers the whole of the period in which the employee was ill after the end of the career break. There will be no entitlement to sick pay under the "scheme" until the employee has returned to work and completed one month's continuous service following the end of his/her career break. Following the completion of the one months service sickness entitlement accrued prior the career break will be reinstated.

The Council is committed to reviewing this policy at regular intervals.



**APPLICATION FOR CAREER BREAK**

To:

From:

CC: Human Resources Officer

I wish to apply for a Career Break under the Council's Career Break Scheme

Length of time employed by Antrim Borough Council \_\_\_\_\_

My current post is \_\_\_\_\_

My current Grade is \_\_\_\_\_

My reasons for wishing to apply for a Career Break are \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Proposed duration of Career Break \_\_\_\_\_

Proposed date of commencement \_\_\_\_\_

Proposed date of return \_\_\_\_\_

I confirm that I have read, understood and agree to abide by the rules detailed in the Scheme if my application is approved by Council.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



**RECOMMENDATION FOR CAREER BREAK**

To be completed by relevant Director

Recommendation for proceeding with Career break Application

**YES \ NO**

Please specify reasons

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Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Action Taken by Human Resources Section**

Proceed with Application YES \ NO

Discuss further with Director  
(Based on above) YES \ NO

Inform Applicant request declined YES \ NO

**If proceeding with Application forward to Strategy & Resources Committee for approval.**

Approval Granted YES \ NO

Approved \ Declined By \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for above \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Agreed duration of Break  
(if Agreed) \_\_\_\_\_

**Actioned By** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_  
(H R Section)