Career Breaks

This policy applies to Professional and Support and Teaching & Scholarship staff.

Birkbeck acknowledges that employees may wish to take a career break without wishing to lose all contact with Birkbeck and to be able to return to work at the end of the break.

Employees with five years continuous service or more may request to take an unpaid career break for a period of up to one year. In exceptional circumstances, applications may be considered from those who do not have five years service, on a case by case basis. This policy is applied strictly at the discretion of Birkbeck and is not a statutory entitlement. Birkbeck recognises that in order for such a policy to be effective the employee will need to keep in touch with Birkbeck and be updated with organisational changes through a variety of provisions appropriate to his/her situation.

The terms of this policy do not apply to those employees wishing to take Parental, Paternity, Adoption or Maternity Leave. These circumstances are more appropriately dealt with according to the Family, Paternity and Parental Leave or Maternity or Adoption Policies respectively.

Academic employees wishing to take a leave of absence for academic purposes, which are directly linked to their work, must refer to the Leave of Absence Procedure for Academic Staff.

Procedure

Employees wishing to be considered for a career break must, in the first instance, discuss their application with their line manager. A formal application must then be made in writing and contain details of the reasons for the career break, the length of break being requested (between three months and one year) and any other supporting information.

The employee should discuss their request at the earliest possible opportunity. In any event, no such requests will be accepted less than three months before the start of the proposed period of absence.

The decision regarding the acceptance or rejection of the application lies with the School Manager or Director of Professional Service Department, but liaison with Human Resources must take place before a decision is reached. The line manager will therefore liaise with the
appropriate senior manager and with Human Resources. A meeting may be arranged to discuss the application with the employee.

When considering such an application the following factors will be taken into account:

- the employee’s length of service;
- the needs of the students/staff that the individual supports
- the business needs of the department and the College at the time when the absence is requested;
- whether the applicant has taken a career break on previous occasions;
- the purpose of, or reasons for the career break;
- the length of time of the absence period requested;
- the realistic potential for offering a continuation of the employment contract for the period of the break;
- whether Birkbeck need more notice of the request to take a career break;
- the availability of the essential support for the duration of the break.

It is stressed that not all applications for a career break will be approved. Employees must therefore not commit themselves to any travel plans prior to their application being considered. Employees must also be reminded that any unauthorised absence will be subject to investigation and may lead to further action under Birkbeck’s Disciplinary Procedure.

It is recommended that any employee, who is taking a career break of six months or more, has a Performance and Development Review appraisal prior to their absence (providing they have not had one in the preceding six months). This should be revisited on their return. Please refer to the Performance and Development Review Scheme for further details.

A member of the Human Resources team will inform the employee of the decision, in writing, at the earliest opportunity. Where a career break is approved, a letter of confirmation will also detail the conditions of the career break to be applied.

The employee may appeal against the decision by utilising Birkbeck’s Grievance Procedure.

**Provisions**

Subject to a career break being approved, it is a requirement that, before taking the career break, this offer is accepted, understood and agreed by the applicant.
The following terms may apply:

1. The employee will benefit from a continued contractual relationship by being “retained as an employee”, with the right to maintain unbroken service and a job (or redundancy if a job is unavailable) at the end of the career break.
2. During the career break all remuneration will cease including employer and employee pension contributions.
3. During the career break period, the employee’s pension membership will be suspended. The Employee may elect to pay their and the employer’s pension contribution to maintain continuity of service if they so wish.
4. Holidays will continue to accrue during the career break leave but the accrued holiday days must be taken either at the beginning or end of the career break and individuals may not elect otherwise.
5. Death in Service benefits, if applicable before the leave period, will continue throughout the career break but the College’s insurers must be informed if the employee intends to visit high risk countries and/or participate in any dangerous sports or activities (as defined by the insurers) during their absence.
6. It should be noted that all other benefits will be discontinued for the duration of the absence.
7. The employee must supply full details of contact addresses and telephone numbers in order to enable the College to contact the employee in case of any emergency during the period of the career break.
8. Any employee on a career break may not work for any other employer during their absence without prior written authorisation from the Human Resources team. However if Birkbeck is not currently your only employer this may be waived, you should detail this in your career break request and speak to a member of Human Resources about it.
9. The line manager is responsible for ensuring that the employee is assigned a member of staff to liaise with the employee. Each employee will be provided with a mentor/contact. The employee is encouraged to maintain regular contact with their mentor during his/her period of absence.
10. All employees must return on the date originally agreed. Employees intending to return to work on date earlier than the previously agreed return date must liaise with their line manager to establish an appropriate alternate return date. The line manager has responsibility to ensure that Human Resources are advised and that the relevant contractual communications are carried out.
11. There is no guaranteed right to return to the existing job. Upon return, if the employee’s previous job is not available, every effort will be made to provide a
suitable alternative opportunity including redeployment where appropriate and acceptable.

12. Upon a successful return, length of service and all terms and conditions will be re-instated. There will not be any incremental progression or annual accrual for the period on career break.

13. Upon return, the same salary (plus any cost of living increases) will apply as at the start of the career break, irrespective of any Salary Review dates which may have occurred during the employee’s absence. The employee’s salary will not be reviewed until the next review cycle following their return.

Failure to return to work

In the event that an employee finds themselves unable to return to work on the due date he/she must, in advance of this date, contact the College to inform them of the reasons for the delay and support such reasons with any available proof e.g. medical certificates, proof of changes to the travel itinerary out of the control of the employee.

Where there is a failure to return on the due date, and no alternative return date has been agreed, the unauthorised absence could potentially be considered to be gross misconduct. If the subsequent investigation does not find that the delayed return and lack of communication is justified, the employee will be summarily dismissed from the College’s employment in accordance with Birkbeck’s Disciplinary Procedure.

Responsibility

The application of this policy is entirely at the discretion of Birkbeck.

Managers are responsible for ensuring that this policy is applied within their own area. Any queries on the application or interpretation of this policy must be discussed with the Human Resources team prior to any action being taken.

The Human Resources team has the responsibility for ensuring the maintenance, regular review and updating of this policy. Revisions, amendments or alterations to the policy can only be implemented following consideration and agreement by the Director of Human Resources and in consultation with the Trade Unions. The Director of Human Resources will ensure that changes and amendments are then approved by the appropriate College Committee.