

Career breaks policy

New policy number: **438**
 Old instruction number: **PER:G020:a2**
 Issue date: **20 June 2006**
 Reviewed as current: **26 March 2025**
 Owner: **Head of HR Operations and Systems, People Services**
 Responsible work team: **Policy, Pay and Reward**

Contents

- 1 Introduction 2
- 2 Definition..... 2
- 3 Eligibility 2
- 4 Criteria 2
- 5 Notice 3
- 6 Contract 3
- 7 Pensions 3
- 8 Return to work..... 4
- 9 Application 4
- 10 Records 5
- 11 Help and support 5
- Document history 6**

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This policy sets out the arrangements for a career break and applies to employees.
- 1.2 The Brigade is committed to actively promoting diversity and providing flexibility that will help you to achieve a better work-life balance. The Brigade recognises that there may be periods when you need or wish to take an extended period of leave from work. The career break scheme is part of a package of work-life balance measures to meet this need.
- 1.3 This policy should be applied in line with the Brigade's values:
 - Service – We put the public first.
 - Courage – We step up to the challenge.
 - Learning – We listen so that we can improve.
 - Teamwork – We work together and include everyone.
 - Equity – We treat everyone fairly according to their needs.
 - Integrity – We act with honesty.

2 Definition

- 2.1 A career break is an agreed period of unpaid absence from work. The period can range from three months to one year. In exceptional circumstances you may apply to extend your period of absence to a maximum total period of two years, with the agreement of both the employee's head of service/ assistant commissioner/director and the Head of HR Operations and Systems, People Services. You will return to work in the same grade/role although not necessarily in the same job, posting or location.
- 2.2 It is entered in to by the Brigade, while there is a reasonable assumption that you may return to employment with the Brigade, it should not be used as a way for early retirement, or to effectively resign early for any other reason.

3 Eligibility

- 3.1 The scheme is available to all permanent employees who have completed five years continuous service with the Brigade. There is not an automatic entitlement to a career break. A career break may be granted at the discretion of the Brigade. Although the granting of a career break will always be subject to the needs and requirements of the Brigade, the aim will be to meet your reasonable expectations. You can take a maximum of two career breaks with a minimum requirement of five years' service between the end of one break and the beginning of the next break. You will not normally be eligible to apply for a career break if you are on a development programme (e.g. as part of a promotion process); subject to any live discipline (conduct, or performance) sanctions or investigations; or if you have an unsatisfactory attendance record (e.g. on a live monitoring period under the capability process. Disability related absence will not constitute unsatisfactory attendance for the purpose of a career break application, nor exclude applications for consideration.

4 Criteria

- 4.1 The Brigade will consider granting a career break for the following reasons:
 - Carer responsibilities including children, people over 55, people with disabilities or health issues.

- To attend full time education.
- For reasons of personal development.
- To perform voluntary work.
- Extended trips overseas for charity and family commitments.

4.2 The above list is not exclusive and there may be other reasons for applications being considered. Each application will be considered on its own merits.

4.3 You will not be allowed to undertake full time employment whilst on a career break. Within this scheme full time paid employment means any activity for hire or gain (including holding office in a company, firm or business organisation) in which the employee is engaged for in excess of an average thirty hours per week over a reference period of twelve weeks. Policy number 551 - Outside employment policy and section Jb of the Staff Code will continue to apply throughout the career break which you are advised to read. Any breach of the outside employment policy or section Jb of the Staff Code may be subject to disciplinary action.

5 Notice

5.1 You are required to give at least three months' notice to take a career break. In exceptional circumstances the Brigade may agree to reduce the notice period.

6 Contract

6.1 The contract of employment will continue for the duration of the career break and this period will not be regarded as a break in service. This period will not count as reckonable service for pensions, long service leave, long service benefits, competent plus salary payment (uniformed staff only) medals or certificates, salary progression increases (FRS staff only), accrual of sick pay entitlement or redundancy. Service after the return to work date will be added to previous service (prior to the career break) for the provision of long service leave, salary incremental progression and redundancy. All pay and benefits (including sick pay and annual leave) will be suspended during the career break. Sick pay entitlement following the return to work will be based on the previous 12 month period, excluding the period of the Career Break. Your employment protection rights, both during the break and immediately upon return to work, will be safeguarded provided you comply with the terms of the Career Break Agreement.

- If you decide, at any time during the career break, not to return to work, notice must be given in accordance with your conditions of service.
- All accrued but untaken leave must be taken prior to the career break. Any leave not taken prior to the career break will be forfeited. If at the start of the career break you have taken more leave than you have accrued, this will be deducted from your salary in the month preceding the career break, or as soon as possible thereafter.
- If you are in the leased car scheme then you must return the lease car on your last day before the career break begins.

If you are undertaking an apprenticeship, then you must also seek confirmation from Learning and Professional Development in advance. If absent for 28 days or more, an apprenticeship may be paused or stopped outright, depending on the circumstances. The request on these grounds alone is likely to be declined.

7 Pensions

7.1 Members of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (FPS) are advised to contact the Local Pensions Partnership (LPP) to obtain detailed information on your pension situation.

- 7.2 Subject to the rules of the appropriate pension scheme applicable at the time, you may be able to buy back service upon return to work. You are advised to obtain your own independent advice before making a decision which may affect your pension entitlement. Currently members of the LGPS and, FPS will be allowed to buy back service upon their return to work, which will be at the rate applicable to your salary at that time plus the employer's contribution rate.

8 Return to work

- 8.1 There may be a requirement for you to undergo familiarisation training before resuming your post. This may include a fitness assessment and health screening. The extent of this training will vary, taking into account the circumstances of each case, but will result in a 'training needs assessment plan' agreed between you and your manager in accordance with Policy number 427 - Development and maintenance of operational professionalism (DaMOP). This will be in liaison with the Operations Support Team for Control staff.
- During the career break contact should be maintained between you, your manager and HR Services. You must provide a contact address and personal email address to your line manager, should there be a need to correspond during the break, this will also help verify identity.
 - Notice of any change of circumstances (change of address, personal email address etc.) should be forwarded to your manager and confirmed with them, and with HR Services too.
 - Although a return to work date is agreed at the time the career break is approved, you should confirm your intention to return to work in writing no later than two months before the return date. This notice should be sent to your manager and a copy should be sent to HR Services.
 - If you want to apply to change the return date, this may only be done if it is within the scope of the career break scheme and with the agreement of the relevant assistant commissioner/assistant director. At least one month's written notice must be given by you in these circumstances.
 - If you fail to return to work following the end date of your career break, without appropriate authorisation e.g., in the form of an extension of the career break or the booking of annual leave then you will be deemed to have resigned on the day after the career break has ended.

9 Application

- 9.1 Applications for a career break must be made on the Career Break Application Form and submitted via your manager to your assistant director/deputy assistant commissioner no later than three months prior to the intended start date of the career break. In the case of operational staff, the deputy assistant commissioner must liaise with Central Operations Business Support prior to any decision being made. In making the decision, the Brigade will consider your eligibility to apply for a career break, the reasons for the request; and the business needs, (the career break quota). There is a limit on the numbers of staff within each occupational group allowed to participate in the scheme at any one time and this will be considered. The Career Break Application Form is located on the system in: Start/New office document/Forms(stations)/Personnel forms/Career break application form.
- 9.2 The decision on an application for a career break will be communicated to you by your head of service or assistant director/ assistant commissioner as soon as possible. The application form will be sent to HR Services for processing and monitoring purposes. In the case of operational staff, Central Operations Business Support will pass the application form to HR Services. All applications will be treated in confidence and strictly on their own merits. HR Services will send the Career Break Agreement, which sets out the terms and conditions of the break, to you which you will be required to sign.

10 Records

- 10.1 Please send records by email to RecordsServices@london-fire.gov.uk. Records will be kept on your electronic personal record file (e-PRF) and retained in accordance with Policy number 788 - Electronic personal record files (e-PRF). Personal data shall be processed in accordance with Policy number 351 – Data protection and privacy policy.

11 Help and support

- 11.1 Please contact the HR Help Desk on extension 89100 (option 3) or Central Operations Business Support by email: ODSGAdmin2@london-fire.gov.uk. The LPP can be contacted on 0300 323 0260.
- 11.2 This policy may also be available on request in other alternative accessible formats as set out in Policy number 290 – Guidance note on translation and interpretation. Please contact Communications on extension 30753 and by email to communications.team@london-fire.gov.uk to discuss your needs and options.
- 11.3 The Brigade invites your engagement so that it can learn so if you have a suggestion that can improve this policy then please submit your idea via the Staff Suggestion Scheme on Hotwire as set out in Policy number 887 – Staff suggestion scheme. Any changes do need to go through the agreed engagement, consultation, negotiation or governance requirements

Document history

Assessments

An equality, sustainability or health, safety and welfare impact assessment and/or a risk assessment was last completed on:

EIA	06/11/23	SDIA	L – 23/02/26	HSWIA	20/02/26	RA	NA
-----	----------	------	--------------	-------	----------	----	----

Audit trail

Listed below is a brief audit trail, detailing amendments made to this policy/procedure.

Page/para nos.	Brief description of change	Date
Page 5, para 10.1	Records Services details added.	24/05/2024
Page 5, para 11.2	Staff Suggestion scheme access details added.	
Page 3, Para 6.1	Returning lease car details added.	26/03/2025
Throughout	Reviewed against updated 2025 Grey Book 7 th edition.	19/05/2025
Page 6	SDIA and HSWIA updated.	24/02/2026
Page 1 and page 2, para 2.1	References to the job title Assistant Director, People Services replaced with Head of HR Operations and Systems, People Services.	23/04/2026

Subject list

You can find this policy under the following subjects.

Leave	
-------	--

Freedom of Information Act exemptions

This policy/procedure has been securely marked due to:

Considered by: (responsible work team)	FOIA exemption	Security marking classification