



CAREER BREAK POLICY

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CAREER BREAK POLICY

CONTENTS

	Page
1. Application	1
2. Policy Aim	2
3. Policy Objective	2
4. Policy Outcome	2
5. Policy Statement	2
6. Eligibility	2
7. Application Process	2

Appendix 1 Information and Guidance

Appendix 2 Making an Application

1. Application

The Board has a wide range of policies which may apply to different categories of people.

An employee is any person under a current contract of employment with PBNI, including temporary and fixed term contracts.

An agency worker is any person supplied to work with PBNI through an employment agency.

A secondee is any person working with PBNI under a formal secondment agreement between the Board and another organisation.

A student is any person working with PBNI on the basis of a formal agreement between the Board and his/her university, college or other course provider.

A volunteer is any person working with PBNI under the Board's Volunteering Policy.

A partnership worker is any person working with PBNI on the basis of a formal partnership agreement between the Board and another organisation.

The application of this policy to any of the categories above who are not employees of the Board does not in any way confer on their employee status.

This policy applies only to employees of the Board, excluding those employed on temporary or fixed term contracts. Such excluded employees who meet the eligibility criteria set out in Section 6, may however make application for a period of unpaid special leave to meet family or personal circumstances subject to any such period not exceeding the planned duration of contract.

2. Policy Aim

To set out the Board's position on the granting of career breaks to employees.

For the purposes of this policy a career break is defined as an extended period of unpaid leave which allows an employee to opt out of work and return after an agreed period.

3. Policy Objective

To provide a clear framework for application for career break and the consideration of such requests.

4. Policy Outcome

The operation of career break arrangements in PBNI will be in accordance with this policy.

5. Policy Statement

- 5.1 Each application will be considered on its merits under established criteria.
- 5.2 Such consideration will take account of PBNI's service needs at the time.
- 5.3 The provisions of this policy are in addition to such provisions as may be available under other arrangements for special leave or flexible working.

6. Eligibility

- 6.1 Applications may be made by employees who have a minimum of 3 years continuous service with the Board
- 6.2 Applications will be considered on grounds of personal or family circumstances.

For example:

- To care for children or other dependants
- To deal with other personal or family issues which can't be managed alongside work demands
- To help someone deal with issues connected to disability

7. Duration

- 7.1 The minimum career break is 1 year and the maximum is 2 years
- 7.2 An employee who is granted a career break of less than 2 years may apply to have it extended up to the 2 year maximum.
- 7.3 On return from career break the employee is guaranteed a post at the same grade but not necessarily at the same location or with the same range or balance of duties.
- 7.4 Although very exceptional circumstances will be considered the usual position is that the maximum number of career breaks available during service with PBNI is two with a requirement for a minimum period of 5 years service between the end of the first career break and the beginning of the second.

Note: Where an employee exercises the right to take unpaid leave included in a maternity absence all such periods will be ignored for the purposes of any future career break application.

8. Application Process

- 8.1 Application must be made through line management using the standard application form.

8.2 Clarification or verification of details provided on the application form may be sought as part of the consideration process.

8.3 Where an application is refused by the ACO – Human Resources the applicant may raise the matter under the provisions set down in the Board’s grievance procedures.

8.4 Detailed information on the application process is set out in Appendix 2.

9. **Other Information**

Please see also the detailed information set out under the following headings in Appendix 1.

- What is a Career Break?
- Who can apply and on what grounds?
- What happens when someone returns to PBNI from a career break?
- What if someone can’t return on the agreed date because of illness?
- What happens if someone wants to return earlier than expected?
- What effect will taking a career break have on my pension arrangements?
- Will someone on a career break still be a Board employee?

Note: The information set out in Appendix 2 deals with important implications for employees contemplating a career break and merits given careful and detailed consideration.

10. **Review**

This policy will be reviewed at the 3 year point from implementation.

Career Break Policy

Information and Guidance

Q 1 What is a Career Break?

A A career break is an extended period of unpaid absence which allows someone to opt out of work and then return after an agreed period.

Because the period of absence is unpaid there are important implications for National Insurance contributions and individuals should seek the advice of the Social Security Agency.

There are also important pension implications which are referred to under Q 6 below.

In PBNI the minimum career break period is 1 year and the maximum is 2 years.

Anyone who is granted a career break of less than 2 years may apply to have it extended up to the 2 years.

Although very exceptional circumstances may be considered the usual position is that the maximum number of career breaks available during service with PBNI is two and minimum period of service between the end of the first career break and the beginning of the second is 5 years.

Q 2 Who can apply and on what grounds?

A To apply an employee must have completed 3 years service with PBNI.

Applications will be considered on grounds of personal or family circumstances.

For example

- To care for children or other dependants
- To deal with other personal or family issues which can't be managed alongside work demands
- To help someone deal with issues connected to disability

Q 3 What happens when someone returns to PBNI from a career break?

A The advantage of a career break is that a post is held open during the period of absence. While we can guarantee that a post of the same grade will be available on return, we cannot guarantee a return to the same location or the same range or balance of type of work.

It is a requirement on people on career break that they contact the Human Resources Department at least 4 months in advance of the agreed return date to indicate

- a) Their intention to return by the agreed date. This allows discussion and planning for their return.
- b) That they wish consideration to be given to an extension (where the initial agreement was for less than 2 years)
- c) They do not intend to return and will be resigning from PBNI.

Q 4 What happens if someone can't return on the agreed date because of illness?

A If the delay in return is more than 5 working days a medical certificate must be provided.

Where such circumstances arise the person cannot resume paid employment with the Board until medically certified as fit for a return to work.

Q 5 What happens if someone wants to return earlier than expected?

A They should contact the Human Resources Department to discuss options.

The request will be considered in the context of the individual circumstances and the Boards staffing and financial position at the time.

Q 6 What effect will taking a career break have on my pension arrangements?

A The question of pension provision is critically important for anyone who is a member of the NILGOSC scheme.

Key issues are

- Contributions must be paid for the first 30 days of the career break and these will be deducted from the last months pay before the break begins.

2

- The remainder of the career break will not count as service towards pension. On return to work at the end of the career break an employee has the option of paying additional contributions to make up for the period away.

There are other important issues around the wider provision of the NILGOSC scheme as set out below. They are so important they are printed in bold.

Important Pension Implications

Staff should be aware that earlier arrangements whereby officers continue to make pension contributions during a career break are no longer possible under the NILGOSC regulations.

This change have very significant implications for individuals in terms of benefits payable in certain circumstances.

- (i) **The death in service benefit will not be paid if an office dies during a career break.**

This benefit is currently the equivalent of two years normal pay and although NILGOSC will continue to pay a deferred lump sum and widow(er)s/children(s) benefits the loss to an officer's estate will be significant

- (ii) **In the event of a series illness leading to retirement/dismissal on medical grounds the career break officer will receive lump sum and pension form NILGOSC (subject to medical recommendation) but no enhancement will be payable.**

The impact depends on length of service but in some cases this absence of enhancement could reduce to half the normal rate.

Therefore it is strongly recommended that officers intending to pursue a career break should seek independent advice with a view to obtaining life insurance and permanent health insurance cover for the full duration of the career break.

The cost of such cover will be entirely the responsibility of the individual officer concerned.

3

Q 7 Will someone on a career break still be a Board employee?

A Yes, although the period of absence is unpaid, employees remain within contract because of the agreed right of return.

This means that the Board's requirements in respect of conduct and discipline remain in force.

In the course of a career break an employee must not engage in any activity which could bring the Board to disrepute or call into question the employees suitability to work for PBNI.

Career Break Policy

Making an Application

Action Steps

- Fill in the standard application form (please see copy attached).

The earlier you do this the better and it is helpful if the form is completed no later than 4 months before the date you want the break to start.

Of course emergencies do arise and every effort will be made to respond as quickly as possible.

- Give the form to your line manager. He/she will provide brief comments forwarding it to your senior line manager. If you do not wish to provide details at local level you may send the form direct and in confidence to your senior line manager or the ACO – HR.
- The senior line manager will consult with the ACO-Human Resources and you may be contacted and asked for clarification or verification of detail provided in your application.

You may be asked to consider some change in the dates you have requested or alternatives to a career break available to you under the Board provision.

The decision on your application will be conveyed to you in writing by the ACO – Human Resources.

If you are unhappy with this decision you have the right to raise your concerns under the Board's grievance procedures.

Any notification from the ACO – Human Resources refusing an application or giving conditional approval will include details of how to access that procedure.

- As far as pay increments and other service based entitlements (e.g. leave for some grades) are concerned people must be clear that the career break period will not count as service for any of these purposes.

It is also important to point out that being away on career break is not quite out of sight out of mind.

- During a career break employees continue to be unpaid employees of the Board and remain subject to the Board's requirements in respect of conduct and discipline. In the course of a career break employees must not engage in activity which could bring the Board into disrepute or call into question the employee's suitability to work as a for PBNI.

PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

CAREER BREAK

APPLICATION FORM

NAME OF APPLICANT _____

GRADE _____ **LOCATION** _____

DATE OF ENTRY TO SERVICE _____ **STATUS** F/T P/T

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDANCE _____

_____ **POSTCODE** _____

PURPOSE OF CAREER BREAK APPLIED FOR _____

(continue on a separate sheet, if necessary)

FORWARDING ADDRESS DURING CAREER BREAK IF KNOWN _____

DURATION OF CAREER BREAK APPLIED FOR _____

DATE OF START OF CAREER BREAK (ideal) _____

INDICATE IF THERE IS A POSSIBILITY OF APPLICATION FOR AN EXTENSION AT A LATER DATE YES NO DON'T KNOW

SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT _____ **DATE** _____

COMMENTS OF LINE MANAGER _____

SIGNATURE _____ **DATE** _____

.....
COMMENTS OF SENIOR LINE MANAGER _____

SIGNATURE _____ **DATE** _____

DECISION BY THE ACO – HR

SIGNED _____ ACO-HR _____ DATE _____



OUTCOME OF APPEAL TO THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (IF APPLICABLE)

SIGNED _____ CHIEF EXECUTIVE _____ DATE _____