

APPENDIX 15 – CAREER BREAK POLICY

This policy aims to facilitate employees of NICVA who wish to take an extended period of unpaid leave from the workplace to study, spend time with family or dependants, carry out voluntary work or perhaps travel abroad. A career break can be used as an opportunity for personal development.

The aim of the Career Break Policy is to motivate and reward long standing employees for their loyalty and experience by allowing time away from work to pursue personal development or time with their family, while the employee's skills and expertise are retained within NICVA. It is hoped that new ideas, skills, motivation and enthusiasm may result from the employee's period of time away from the workplace.

Applications

Eligible candidates should make applications for Career Breaks under the Flexible Working Policy (Appendix 16).

Obligations on the Employee

An employee on a career break will be required to fulfill certain reasonable conditions intended to enable the employee to keep up to date on work issues. These will be specified in the career break agreement. Examples of such obligations can include:

- paid work for up to four weeks per year by agreement between the line manager and the employee;
- attendance at away days, conferences or meetings;
- attendance at specified courses.

An employee on a break will notify NICVA of changes in address or name as soon as possible.

Obligations on NICVA

NICVA will consult and involve the employee in any proposed restructuring or reorganisation which will affect the post or job content during the course of the break if practicable. Where as a result of restructuring, the original post no longer exists, NICVA will make all reasonable efforts to redeploy the individual on their return. If it is not possible to place the employee, redundancy will apply on the basis of the employee's previous employment.

Restrictions

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 unit and in the given grade to which the applicant belongs. Career breaks may, therefore, have to be refused or delayed

where there are overriding business considerations. Reasons for refusal will be given and conveyed to the applicant as per the Flexible Working Policy.

A career break will only be agreed if adequate cover arrangements can be made. An application from a partner of a job-share arrangement will require consideration in the context of its potential effect on the position of the other partner.

A career break will not be granted for the purpose of taking up alternative salaried or wage earning employment within Northern Ireland unless the prior written approval of NICVA has been obtained. A member of staff 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.

Eligibility

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

- Be a permanent NICVA employee, or a fixed term employee whose contract term allows the duration of the career break to not extend beyond the final year of the contract
- Have at least three years service
- Have not reached minimum retirement age of 65 (the duration of the career break may not extend beyond normal retiring age).
- Have a satisfactory record of attendance, performance and conduct. A member of staff who is subject to disciplinary or inefficiency procedures will not normally be permitted to take a career break until his/her standard of service reaches a satisfactory level.

Duration and Number of Career Breaks

Special leave without pay may be granted for a period of not less than three months, and for any period in excess of three months, up to a maximum of two years.

A career break may be extended, provided the total period does not exceed two years in total, continue into the final year of a fixed term contract, or beyond retirement age.

On returning from a career break, regardless of its duration, staff must complete a further five years' continuous service before becoming eligible to apply for a further career break.

Benefits and Continuity of Employment

Although the career break will not count towards, it will not break continuity of employment.

During the period of the break there will be no pension or National Insurance contribution. The period of break will count as leave of absence and an employee's

service prior to the break will be protected. Annual leave will not accrue during the period of absence covered by the career break. Pension implications should be discussed with the Finance Manager.

Conduct During Career Break

Staff on a career break will be subject to all NICVA regulations and disciplinary action, where appropriate, may be taken.

Return to Duty

A request for return from a career break before the due date will be given consideration if the circumstances giving rise to the request did not exist or could not have been known at the time of the original application. Furthermore, an early request to return will require consideration in the context of its potential effect on the position of employees who are providing cover for the career break.

Staff returning from a career break will normally be assigned to their former post; however there is no guarantee that this will always be possible.

Staff on a career break must contact the Human Resources Officer, in writing, one month before they are due to return, to:

- confirm that they intend to return on the due date; or
- apply for an extension to the career break.

Staff on a career break wishing to resign should give one month's notice, in writing, to the Human Resources Officer.

Those unable to resume work on the due date because of illness will be required to produce the relevant medical evidence.

Staff who fail to comply with the above requirements and who fail to respond to approaches from NICVA about recommencing employment, will be deemed to have resigned on the day following the end of the career break.