

CAREER BREAKS & SABBATICALS



WHAT THE LAW SAYS

Many companies have an official career break or sabbatical policy and this will be in the HR handbook. Even without a career break policy, your company can still give you a sabbatical. Many organisations offer career breaks to employees who've worked there for for a minimum period of time – this is standard practice.

If you're an employee who wants a sabbatical, you might want to know what the law is surrounding career breaks or sabbaticals. Currently the law is silent on career breaks. Your company doesn't have to offer staff a sabbatical if they don't want to.

Career breaks should always be applied equally and fairly – if they're left to a manager's discretion and you don't get one, you might be able to bring a case for discrimination against your employer if you can cite a comparator in similar circumstances. Contact your local Union Branch if you need assistance.

You will also need to protect yourself from unexpected developments. For example, what if you are made redundant while on sabbatical? What if you want to extend or curtail your career break? What if you don't want to come back? What if your job no longer exists and you're offered a different one? All these things must be considered before you take your sabbatical.

Employees can't take legal action if an employer decides they can't return to their job or a similar one.

Finally, be aware that while you are on sabbatical, you are still legally employed by the company, even if you're not being paid.

EXAMPLES OF CORPORATE AGREEMENTS

Royal Mail Group

Who is eligible?

Employees may apply for a career break of between 6 months and up to two years, depending on individual need, if they meet the following criteria:

- They have two years or more continuous service
- They have a record of good performance and satisfactory attendance
- They do not currently have an outstanding overpayment

Royal Mail Group guarantees the right to return following a career break to an employee's former function or business unit only and not necessarily to the same job. In addition, the employee will return to their former or equivalent grade.

Career Break Request

Employees should submit a Career Break Request form to their manager at least 3 months before the proposed start date of the break. The manager then meets with the employee to discuss the application based on the criteria outlined in Royal Mail Group's Career Break Policy. The manager will then make a decision to approve or decline the request after consultation with HR. If approved, the manager should advise you in writing as to the outcome and inform HR.

If the request is declined, the manager should provide you with the reasons in writing. If you are not happy with the decision, you should raise the matter with your line manager in the first instance.

During the career break the manager should ensure that the employee is kept informed of any changes. As the career break approaches (typically three months before the end), the line manager should contact the employee to discuss their return to work. One month before returning to work, HR will email the employee's line manager and request that an Employee Change Request form be completed.

On returning to work the line manager will conduct a re-entry interview and cover areas such as, changes within Royal Mail Group, salary and holiday entitlement.

For more information on the issue, see Royal Mail Group's Career Break Policy.

BT - Time Out

Time Out offers individuals the opportunity to take extended leave whilst providing the business with the mechanism to retain and re-energise a committed workforce.

As a guide, people would take up to a maximum of four breaks totalling up to 2 years, providing that there is a minimum 2 years work period between breaks. Line managers retain the discretion as to whether a sabbatical can be taken, as well as its length and timing, based on operational feasibility and budget availability where applicable.

How it Works

The line manager needs to consider any requests for Time Out, in light of an individual's career/life plan, the future needs of the business and how the unit would operate during the absence. If a line manager is able to accommodate an individual's request for Time Out the line manager needs to consider whether the period would be paid or unpaid.

Trish Lavelle

Assistant Secretary

Education and Equal Opportunities