

Scheme for Career Breaks for Clerical and Administrative Staff in V.E.C's

TO: The Chief Executive Officer of the Vocational Education Committee named in the address

13th June, 1985.

A Chara,

1. I am directed by the Minister for Education to state that she has sanctioned the introduction of career breaks for clerical and administrative staff employed on a permanent basis by Vocational Education Committees.
2. The objectives of the new arrangements are to provide new job opportunities in the V.E.C. Offices and to facilitate permanent V.E.C. clerical and administrative staff who wish to take career breaks. To this end the minister would urge Chief Executive Officer to make every effort to grant such requests on the basis of the following criteria:
 - a) Applications by V.E.C. staff for special leave without pay for career breaks may, as a general rule, be granted.
 - b) An application for special leave without pay for career breaks should be refused only where the Chief Executive Officer is satisfied that the services of the person are such that release would not be possible owing to the exigencies of the service. Applications from staff with specialist skills or qualifications would require careful consideration. The approval of this Department should be obtained before an application for a career break is refused.
 - c) All permanent V.E.C. clerical and administrative staff who have completed their probation period in their existing or previous grade and who have not reached minimum retiring age may apply for special leave without pay for career break. Applications should be made well in advance of the commencement of the break. The duration of a career break may not extend beyond minimum retiring age.
 - d) A career break shall consist of special leave without pay for a period of not less than one year and not more than three years. An officer may apply to have a career break extended, provided the period of special leave without pay does not exceed five years in all.
 - e) A career break may be allowed for most purposes including further education, domestic responsibilities, starting a business or a stay abroad. An officer seeking a career break for the purpose of taking up a job in Ireland should submit a copy of the offer of employment in

support of the application. Each letter authorising a career break should state the specific purpose for which the career break is sought.

- f) Special leave without pay for a career break will not count as service for the purposes of superannuation, annual leave or increments (other than those related to age).
- g) Officers returning to the V.E.C. service, after a career break, should be required to give advance notice of their return at least three months before they are due to resume duty.

3. Vacancies

Vacancies arising when servicing officers take career break may be filled, as may consequential vacancies, including those at recruitment level. Alternatively, a substitute officer may be appointed in accordance with the provisions of Circular Letter F38/80 to an office from which an officer has taken a career break, in which circumstances the vacancy in the appropriate grade below the post to which the acting appointment has been made may be filled. The return of an officer on a career break is dependant upon the return of the substitute officer to a fillable vacancy in his/her substantive grade. In any case, where an officer, who is a senior administrative grade or who holds an office of where there is only one in the V.E.C., proposes to take a career break, this Department should be consulted. Similarly, to avoid difficulties in the V.E.C.'s, which have a small compliment of staff and unnecessary delay for the return to duty of the officer on a career break, this Department should be consulted in relation to the filling of vacancies arising from officers taking career breaks.

4. Return to Duty

At the end of career breaks, officers will return to fillable vacancies as and when they arise in their grade and V.E.C. staff changes should be carefully planned so that an officer returning may be assigned to a vacancy when the career break ends or as soon as possible thereafter. If it is anticipated that there will not be a suitable vacancy when the officer is due to return, the officer should be informed accordingly before taking the career break and if possible, the officer should be given the maximum notice possible and an indication of when a suitable vacancy is expected.

- 5. It is requested that the provisions of this circular be brought to the attention of all permanent clerical and administrative officers in the V.E.C.'s.
- 6. The V.E.C.'s should keep details on the officer's personal record of the duration and purpose of any career break granted.
- 7. The Department of Social Welfare should be notified of the RSI number of each officer going on career break so as that the Department may consider the continued eligibility of the officer for limited Social Welfare Benefits. Officers going on career breaks should be advised of the desirability of maintaining entitlement to limited Social Welfare benefits by payment of

voluntary contributions to the Department of Social Welfare. Enquiries may be made to the Voluntary Contributions Section of that Department.

8. The terms of this circular will apply for a trial period ending 31st December 1985, when the position will be reviewed.
9. It will be necessary to furnish the Department at three monthly intervals, commencing 30th September 1985 with a return showing by grade, age and sex, the number of applications received, the number granted and the purpose and duration of each career break.