

Break in learning policy

Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to support the retention of learners and ensure that Breaks in Learning (BIL) are only approved for valid, evidenced reasons and for an agreed period. A BIL should be used sparingly as it increases the risk of non-completion, negatively impacts learner achievement and reduces the return on investment for employers.

This policy outlines:

- When a BIL may be appropriate
- The procedure for requesting, approving, and monitoring BILs
- Responsibilities of staff, learners, and employers

Eligibility and General Principles

- Learners on funded apprenticeship programmes may request a BIL if they expect to be out of work and unable to engage in learning for 6 weeks or longer.
- A BIL can be planned or unplanned depending on the learner's circumstances.
- Learners must have passed the 6 week point of their programme for their apprenticeship to be officially recognised as a start.
- BILs are not normally approved within the first 3 months of learning, especially for lengthy breaks. In these cases a non-start withdrawal should be completed and the learner may re-start the programme when ready.

Acceptable Reasons for a Break in Learning

- Bereavement
- Learners still in work (exceptional circumstances)
- Personal stress or mental health challenges
- Significant family or domestic issues
- Graduated return-to-work support plans
- These reasons must temporarily prevent the learner from engaging in meaningful learning activity.
- Sickness
- Maternity or paternity leave

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Change of Employer

- Learners changing employer must be referred to the DHA Business Development Team (BDT) via the Change of Employer Form.
- A BIL may be required while BDT negotiate with the new employer.
- Change of employer cases are reviewed weekly at the BDT & MI meeting.
- Team Managers will be informed whether the learner can transfer or must be withdrawn if no employer agreement is secured.

Considering Alternatives

- Before approving a BIL Team Managers must explore alternatives with the learner and employer, such as:
- Shorter or more frequent training sessions
- Reduced assessed work
- Observations or practical assessments
- Adjusted planning to accommodate temporary challenges
- A BIL should only be used when these options are not suitable.

Duration and Return to Learning

- A return date must be agreed with the learner and employer before the BIL is approved—normally up to a maximum of 3 months.
- Longer periods may be approved for long-term sickness or maternity.
- Any request to extend a BIL must be formally agreed and documented.
- Learners will either return to learning or be withdrawn. Team Managers are responsible for withdrawal decisions and must follow the withdrawal process, informing the learner and employer and giving them a timeframe to respond if they disagree.

Monitoring BIL Learners

- A SharePoint spreadsheet is maintained for all learners on a BIL.
- Data is populated by the MI team using information provided in the BIL request form.
- Team Managers review BIL cases monthly during RAG meetings and ensure the spreadsheet is updated.

Procedure for Requesting and Managing a Break in Learning

- **Request Initiation**
 - Trainer, BDT, or employer informs the Team Manager of the request for a BIL.
- **Initial Assessment**
 - Team Manager reviews the reason and expected period of absence.
 - Evidence must be collected from the learner or employer (verbally or by email), confirming the reason and planned return date.
- **Panel Review**
 - Team Manager presents the request to Director of Operations.(DOO)
 - DOO reviews the request and makes a decision.
- **Decision Communication**
 - Team Manager informs the learner and employer of the outcome.
 - If declined, the Team Manager explains alternative support options (e.g., adjusting learning activity or employer release time).
- **Confirmation and Documentation**
 - Team Manager confirms the approved BIL in writing, including the agreed return/review date.
 - Team Manager completes the BIL form and submits it with evidence to the MI team.
- **Recording the BIL**
 - The BIL start date is the last date of direct learning activity with the trainer.
 - Team Manager must reference evidence of last learning activity.
 - MI staff record the BIL on PICS and add the learner to the BIL spreadsheet.
- **Ongoing Review**
 - Team Managers review BIL learners monthly at RAG and update records.
 - Team Managers follow the withdrawal process where appropriate.
- **Return to Learning**
 - Trainer notifies MI when the learner resumes learning so funding can restart.
 - Trainer completes a review with the learner to reset targets and next steps.
 - MI removes the learner from the BIL spreadsheet and issues the trainer with a new planned end date.
 - Trainer updates the ILP accordingly.