



ACADEMIC CAREER BREAKS

The Perceptions,
Implications & Experiences

A Study About Returning To Academia

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INTRODUCTION

Academics take career breaks from research and teaching for a number of reasons. To have children. To care for their families. To learn new skills. To explore different career routes.

But what are the perceptions that prevent more people from taking career breaks? What are the real and perceived implications for people's careers? Are there other motivations? And does the impact of a career break vary depending on your gender, discipline and the stage you are at in your career journey?

It's an issue that attracts lots of interest, not to mention controversy. But there hasn't been much research into this area until now. So piirus.ac.uk, jobs.ac.uk and Research Media have collaborated together on the largest independent study of its kind into academic career breaks.

We've surveyed over 5,000 academics and created a thought leadership study that provides much needed insight into the impact of career breaks for academics and those who support academics.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Academics take career breaks for many different reasons, and this break can impact your life, your family, your career, your research and where you work. This is something that may affect us all at some point in our working lives, yet there has been very little research on career breaks in academia.

So, piirus.ac.uk, jobs.ac.uk and Research Media have partnered to better understand the thoughts and experiences of over 5,000 academics around the world.

Through our online survey we've gained a unique insight into the views and experiences of the academic community and learnt what academics and researchers feel about career breaks. We've explored the motivations, challenges, opportunities and both the perceived and real implications of academic career breaks.

Our goal was to provide academics and their employers with more information based on real-life experiences to help inform personal decisions and enable universities to better prepare for career breaks and provide the support their employees need to relaunch their career when they return.

These are just some of the questions to which we sought answers:

- What are the main reasons for academics taking a career break?
- What factors prevent academics from taking a career break?
- What is the perceived impact of an academic career break on professional life?
- How satisfied are academics with the level of support provided by their employers during and after their career break?
- What career paths do academics take when they return from a career break?

At a time when it's more important than ever to attract and keep hold of the best talent – over 45% of people who took a career break returned to work with another employer.

Over half of the respondents who hadn't taken a career break – had considered taking one.

Our study discovered that some disciplines see career breaks more negatively than others. We explored the different attitudes of people at different stages of their career. We asked academics what work related activities they got up to during their career break. We found out that more women take career breaks than men and that those in senior roles are more likely to take shorter career breaks and be more active while they are on them. We also learnt more about the worries that prevented people from taking a career break.

Whether you're thinking about taking a career break yourself or you're a leader who wants to understand more about the motivations and implications – read on to discover more.

This is the largest independent study of its kind into academic career breaks.

Key findings

- Just under half of our respondents had taken an academic career break with 89% of these returning to an academic role.
- 34% of respondents had taken more than one career break.
- The main reasons for taking a career break are maternity leave and redundancy/reaching the end of a contract.
- People's perceptions of career breaks are much more negative prior to taking it.
- Male respondents had a more positive perception of career breaks both before and following the career break.
- 70% of women returning from maternity leave go back to the same job.
- The main concern before taking a career break was the negative impact it could have on future employment, salary and promotion opportunities. This was closely followed by the ability to bid for funding.
- Academics at an early stage in their career were a lot more concerned about the negative impact a career break could have on their progress as an academic.
- Academics from science subjects such as biological sciences were more negative about career breaks than other disciplines.
- A long career break is more likely to result in someone returning to work part time. Those who take shorter breaks are more likely to return full time.
- Those who take longer career breaks (one year or more) are the most likely to return to an academic job with a different employer.
- The majority of academics stayed in contact with people in their field during their career break.

About our survey

When?

Our online survey was carried out between February and March 2016.

Why?

Information about the real and perceived impacts of career breaks was scarce up until this point.

To provide academics and those who support academics with an invaluable insight into the challenges and opportunities involved in re-launching an academic or research career after a prolonged break.

Who?

Our data is based on the responses we gathered from 5,035 academics across a range of disciplines from all over the world.

Our definition of a career break

A period spent away from employment for reasons such as health, family commitments, industry placements or travel – but with the intent of returning to employment.

Please note: Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number, where appropriate.

1. ACADEMICS ON CAREER BREAKS

Number of respondents who have taken a career break

Answer	Percent
Yes	46%
No	54%

Over a third of the people who said 'yes' are currently on a career break.

Nearly half of our 5,000+ plus respondents have experienced a career break.

Number of career breaks taken

1	66%
2	24%
3	7%
4	1%
5 or more	1%
Cannot quantify	1%

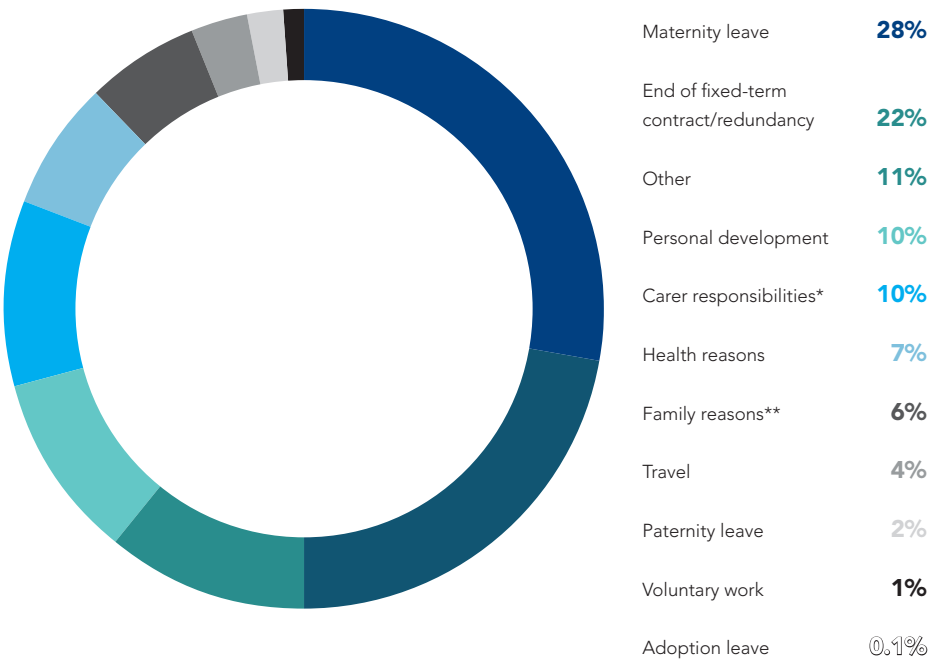
Out of the respondents who have taken a career break – a third have taken more than one.

Typical duration of an academic career break

1-3 months	14%
4-6 months	20%
7-11 months	24%
1-2 years	24%
3-4 years	9%
5-10 years	8%
10+ years	2%

Over two thirds of respondents had a career break that lasted between 4-24 months.

2. CAREER BREAKS – The Key Motivators



*Caring for children, parents, a partner or other family member.

** For example a partner moving locations for job reasons.

The number one reason for taking a career break is maternity leave followed by redundancy or the end of a fixed-term contract.

Other reasons for taking a career break:

- Further study, professional development or studying a PhD
- Civil unrest and relocation
- Workplace harassment, bullying or discrimination
- Career change

3. CAREER BREAK –

The Impact on Career Paths

What role do academics return to after taking a career break?



The same job with the same employer **39%**

A research or teaching job with a different employer **37%**

A different research or teaching job with the same employer **14%**

A non-research or non-teaching job with a different employer **9%**

A non-research or non-teaching job with the same employer **2%**

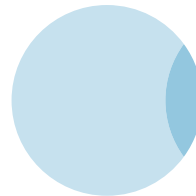
Key findings

- 89% returned to an academic* role
- Only 39% returned to their former role
- 11% returned to a non-academic role
- Over 45% of people returned to work with a different employer

*'Academic role' is defined as 'a teaching or research job'.

Academics who planned to return to their former role after a career break

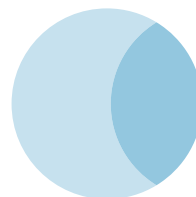
Did
89%



Didn't
11%

The majority of respondents returned to full-time roles

Full time
60%



Part time
40%

The relationship between career paths and career break duration

	Same job with the same employer	Different research or teaching job with the same employer	Non-research or non-teaching job with the same employer	Research or teaching job with a different employer	Non-research or non-teaching job with a different employer	Full time	Part time
1-3 months	52%	16%	1%	25%	6%	73%	27%
4-6 months	88%	8%	0%	4%	0%	76%	24%
7-11 months	55%	11%	2%	27%	5%	60%	40%
1-2 years	30%	13%	2%	44%	11%	58%	42%
3-4 years	11%	15%	2%	56%	17%	51%	49%
5-10 years	4%	18%	2%	56%	19%	30%	70%
10+ years	9%	13%	0%	65%	13%	32%	68%

Key findings

- Academics who take long career breaks are more likely to return in a part-time role
- Academics who take shorter breaks are more likely to return in a full-time role
- Those who take longer career breaks (one year or more) are the most likely to return to an academic job with a different employer
- Over half of the people who take a career break between 1-11 months return to their same job with the same employer.

The relationship between the number of career breaks and career path

	Same job with the same employer	Different research or teaching job with the same employer	Non-research or non-teaching job with the same employer	Research or teaching job with a different employer	Non-research or non-teaching job with a different employer	Full time	Part time
1	34%	15%	1%	41%	9%	61%	39%
2	50%	8%	2%	30%	9%	58%	42%
3	49%	14%	2%	28%	6%	65%	35%
4	58%	17%	0%	17%	8%	58%	42%
5 or more	75%	25%	0%	0%	0%	25%	75%
Cannot quantify	33%	33%	17%	0%	17%	50%	50%

Key findings

- Over half of respondents who took 4 or more career breaks returned to the same job with the same employer
- 50% of those who took two career breaks returned to the same job, compared to 34% who took just one break
- The more career breaks* you have the more likely you are to return part time.

*This figure does not recognise whether the respondent was working full-time or part-time prior to their career break.

The relationship between the motivator for a career break and the role returned to

		Same job with the same employer	Different research or teaching job with the same employer	Non-research or non-teaching job with the same employer	Research or teaching job with a different employer	Non-research or non-teaching job with a different employer
Maternity leave	28%	70%	8%	1%	18%	4%
End of fixed-term contract/ redundancy	22%	7%	24%	2%	54%	13%
Other	11%	22%	18%	2%	49%	9%
Personal development	10%	28%	10%	4%	43%	14%
Carer responsibilities	10%	17%	18%	0%	50%	15%
Health reasons	7%	49%	11%	0%	31%	9%
Family reasons	6%	13%	9%	4%	59%	16%
Travel	3%	20%	15%	4%	46%	15%
Paternity leave	2%	72%	6%	3%	19%	0%

Key findings

- 70% of academics returned to the same job after maternity leave
- 22% of academics who returned from maternity leave left their employer
- Only 17% of those who took a career break for caring responsibilities returned to the same job – 18% changed roles with the same employer, yet 50% took on academic roles elsewhere.

Unsurprisingly, over 50% of those who took a career break because they were at the end of a contract, returned to academic work with another employer. But interestingly 24% stayed with their existing employer. Less than 15% took on a non-academic role either with an existing or different employer.

Motivator for a career break by contract type		
	Full time	Part time
Maternity leave	49%	51%
End of fixed-term contract/redundancy	75%	25%
Other	65%	35%
Personal development	71%	29%
Carer responsibilities	43%	57%
Health reasons	67%	33%
Family reasons	58%	42%
Travel	75%	25%
Paternity leave	84%	16%

The top three career break categories that saw respondents return to a part-time role

- Caring responsibilities (57%)
- Maternity leave (51%)
- Family reasons (42%)

The top three career break categories that saw respondents return to a full-time role

- Returning from paternity leave (84%)
- Travel (75%)
- Temporary contracts (75%)

4. CAREER BREAKS –

The Impact on Professional Life

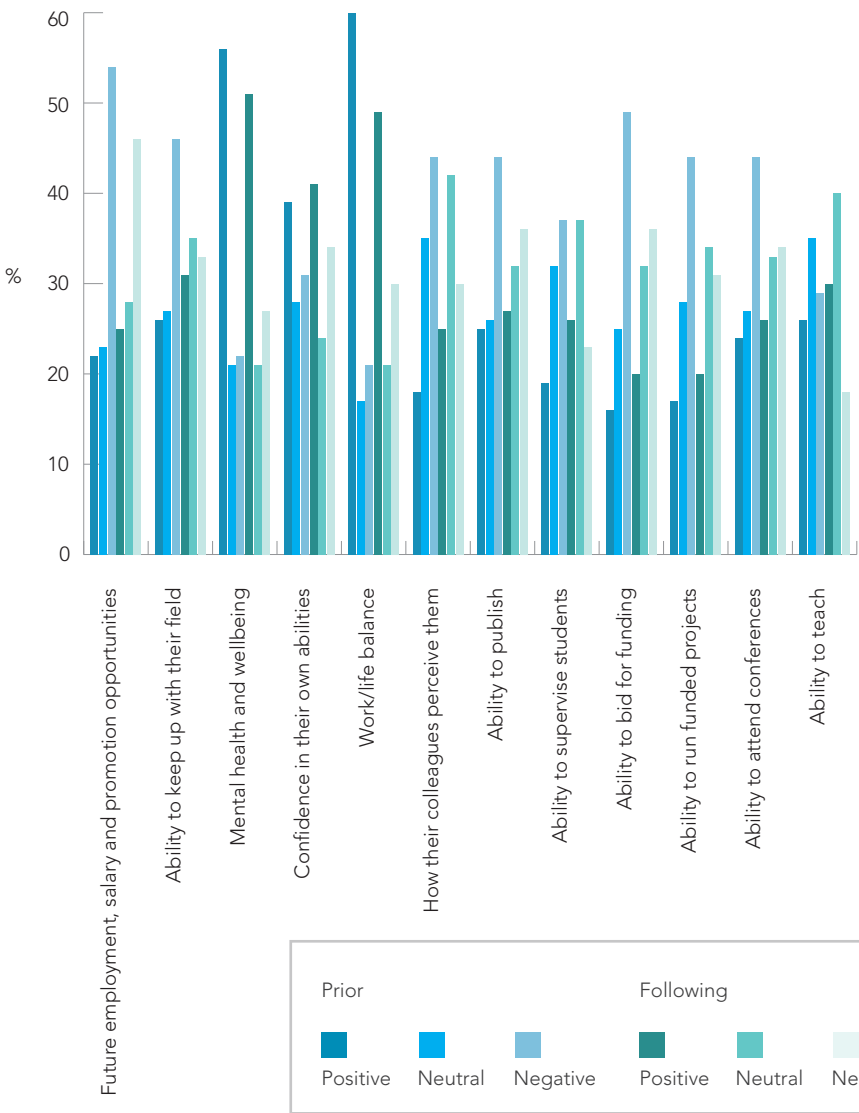
The perceived impact of taking a career break on professional life					
	Very Positive	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Very Negative
Prior to career break	11%	19%	27%	26%	13%
	30%		27%	39%	
Following career break	10%	20%	32%	22%	9%
	30%		32%	31%	

Key findings

- The overall perception of an academic career break was found to be more negative prior to taking it
- Following a career break it was found that the overall experience was a lot more positive or neutral and didn't have the negative impact that was initially thought
- However, the overall experience following a career break was equally negative and neutral with those enjoying a positive experience being fairly equal across the board.

The perceived impact of a career break on specific aspects of professional life

Perceptions – before and after a career break



Before a career break

- The main perceived positive outcomes (above 50%) were improved work/life balance and mental health and wellbeing.
- The main perceived negative outcomes were the impact it would have on future employment, salary and promotion opportunities. This was closely followed by the ability to bid for funding.

	Very Positive	Positive
Work/life balance	23%	37%
	60%	
Mental health & wellbeing	24%	32%
	56%	
Confidence in their own abilities	14%	25%
	39%	

	Negative	Very Negative
Future employment salary & promotion opportunities	36%	18%
	54%	
Ability to bid for funding	30%	18%
	49%	
Ability to keep up with their field	35%	11%
	46%	

After a career break

- True to their perceptions, respondents felt that a career break had a positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing and provided a better work/life balance.
- Respondents also felt that their career break had a negative impact on their future employment, salary and promotion opportunities, as well as their ability to publish and bid for funding.

	Very Positive	Positive
Mental health & wellbeing	20%	31%
	51%	
Work/life balance	18%	30%
	48%	
Confidence in their own abilities	16%	25%
	41%	

	Negative	Very Negative
Future employment salary & promotion opportunities	28%	18%
	46%	
Ability to publish	26%	10%
	36%	
Ability to bid for funding	24%	12%
	36%	

5. THE EXPERIENCE OF TAKING AND RETURNING FROM CAREER BREAKS

How satisfied were academics with the level of support offered by their employers before and after their career break?		
	Before	After
Very satisfied	11%	16%
Satisfied	17%	29%
Neutral	36%	34%
Dissatisfied	15%	13%
Very dissatisfied	21%	8.00%

Key findings

- Over a third of respondents were neither satisfied or dissatisfied with the support they received before and after their career break
- People were happier with the support they received on their return compared to the support offered before their career break.

Did academics access any other formal support when they returned from their most recent career break?

Yes	9%	No	91%
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Key findings

- Of the small number of respondents who accessed formal support:
- 45 (42%) accessed the Daphne Jackson Trust, a dedicated charity that helps those in STEM subjects to return from career breaks
 - 10 (9%) used the support offered by Athena Swan.

6. CAREER BREAKS – The Perceptions

What percentage of respondents considered a career break but decided not to take one?

Yes

57%

No

43%

Of those who haven't taken a career break – over half (57%) have considered taking one.

What were the top three reasons for deciding against a career break?

Not financially viable to take time out	71%
Didn't feel confident about being able to return to the same job	53%
Concerned about how it would look to future employers	44%
Would limit my ability to research, publish, supervise and carry out other academic activities	35%
No sufficiently attractive opportunity	23%
Concerned about how it would look with colleagues	21%
Worried about losing touch with my colleagues and peers	21%

Key findings

- The majority of respondents (70%) thought it wasn't financially viable to take time out for a career break
- The biggest concerns were around retaining or gaining suitable employment on their return, and less about the perception of and relationships with colleagues
- On average, respondents gave 2 or 3 answers to this question suggesting that there are multiple motivating factors for not taking a break (2.77 answers per respondent).

The perceived impact on specific aspects of professional life by those who had considered a career break

	Very Positive	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Very Negative
Future employment, salary & promotion opportunities	4%	10%	22%	46%	18%
Ability to keep up with their field	5%	13%	27%	43%	13%
Mental health and wellbeing	38%	43%	13%	4%	1%
Confidence in their own abilities	12%	31%	35%	18%	2%
Work/life balance	35%	48%	12%	4%	1%
How their colleagues perceive them	2%	10%	41%	38%	8%
Ability to publish	7%	19%	32%	32%	10%
Ability to supervise students	4%	16%	39%	30%	11%
Ability to bid for funding	4%	13%	29%	37%	16%
Ability to run funded projects	5%	14%	36%	31%	14%
Ability to attend conferences	8%	21%	41%	23%	7%
Ability to teach	7%	21%	45%	19%	8%

Wellbeing and work/life balance

- 4 out of 5 respondents said that their career break would have a positive or very positive impact on their wellbeing, mental health and work/life balance
- Only 1 in 20 said career breaks would have a negative effect
- Less than 12% said they would have no effect

Prospects

- 3 out of 5 respondents agreed that career breaks would have a negative impact on future employment, salary and promotion opportunities
- 1 in 5 said that career breaks would have no/neutral impact on career prospects
- 1 in 10 suggested that career breaks may have a positive impact.

Keeping up

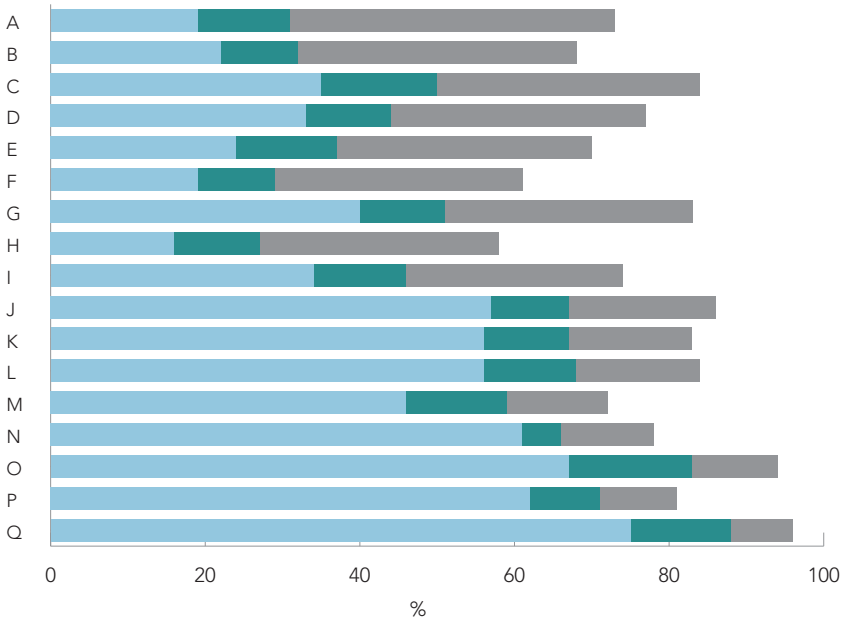
- More than half of respondents said that a career break would have an overall negative impact on their ability to keep up with their field.



7. THE PRESSURE TO STAY CONNECTED

Activities completed during a career break

During career breaks, many academics feel the need to keep active and on top of the latest developments.



A: Teach

B: Supervise students

C: Attend a conference

D: Work on projects that started while you were on your break

E: Engage in outreach or impact activities

F: Work on a funding bid that started while you were on your break

G: Attend other meetings

H: Work on a funding bid that started before your break

I: Work on a publication that started while you were on your break

J: Work on projects that started before your break

K: Work on a publication that started before your break

L: Use academic materials made available by your university library (print or electronic)

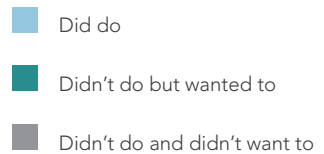
M: Maintain relationship with a mentor

N: Respond to emails on your academic email address

O: Keep abreast of your field

P: Maintain membership of learned society and professional body

Q: Stay in contact with those in your field



Top 5 activities most respondents completed during their career break	Did do
Stayed in contact with those in their field	75%
Kept abreast of their field	67%
Maintained membership of learned society and professional body	62%
Responded to emails on academic email address	61%
Worked on projects that started before their career break	57%

These activities are probably the easiest to do thanks to the digitisation of academia. Today's technologies enable academics to keep in touch with colleagues and peers whilst on a career break and remain passive members of relevant organisations and bodies.

Staying in contact with those in your field

The positive

"A desire to keep myself informed about my field and stay in touch with a few colleagues/collaborators."

The negative

"It's not possible to return to teaching and research with a 100% break. It's been hard enough while staying in touch."

Top 5 activities most respondents wanted to do but didn't	Didn't do but wanted to
Keep abreast of your field	16%
Attend a conference	15%
Engage in outreach or impact activities	13%
Stay in contact with those in your field	13%
Maintain relationship with a mentor	13%

Although these numbers aren't high, they may well reflect the reason why the career break was taken. They may also depend on the ability to keep aware of relevant conferences and events, and maintain strong links with institutions or bodies through access to publications.

There could also be issues with legislation regarding the contacting of employees whilst they are on career break. Particularly if they have an illness or caring responsibilities such as maternity, parental or adoption leave.

Top 5 activities that respondents didn't do and didn't want to do	Didn't do and didn't want to
Teach	42%
Supervise students	36%
Attend a conference	34%
Work on projects that started while you were on your break	33%
Engage in outreach or impact activities	33%

The top three answers aren't surprising, as they all require a physical presence. Some respondents also commented that they took career breaks to actively distance themselves from these activities, so they could focus on other activities such as research and writing.



WANT

The top reasons for respondents wanting to complete certain activities


Love for the field

"Because I enjoyed being able to do the things that I love, as a bonus, as nothing was expected of me!"

"Passion. I used my free time to read and keep abreast of my field. I did it because I liked it, not as an obligation."

"I don't need an employer to do research or teach. I do these things because I love them and I can't think of a life without them."

"It's a labour of love."



"I do what I do not only because someone is paying me but because I enjoy it."

Felt free and able to explore routes

"My brain didn't stop working on maternity leave, quite the opposite! I experienced a surge of creativity during each leave."

A want and drive to grow and develop

"It boosted my confidence to take part in a broader community in my area of work."

"Personal development and rebuilding my CV and my confidence."

To use the time away from teaching to focus on research

"A bit of time to spend on research while I was on a break from teaching".

"Take advantage of having some time to keep working but at a more relaxed rhythm"

"Since I'm both a researcher and a professor, the imposed break from teaching in some ways allowed me to think of my research more freely."

Wanting the intellectual stimulation, especially to avoid isolation

"I was in need of intellectual stimulation."

NEED

The top reasons for respondents feeling the need to complete certain activities


There seems to be a trend of 'Publish or Perish'. Through pressure or fear, many academics feel the need to get data and keep up with the latest developments to compete in their field.

Pressure from academia/institution

"There is pressure in academia to still perform. Just going on maternity leave in academia and completely stop working just does not work. Academia is a longer term thing and you cannot stop fully unless you really want to harm your career."

"Most employers do not take into account maternity leave in academic science."

"If you don't, you drop out of your career, very quickly. Academic work is not one you can just leave behind at the office when you go home."



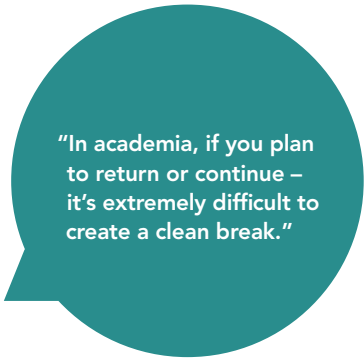
"There was huge pressure and no arrangements had been made to find a replacement."

No one to handover to

"I was given no choice, it seemed to be expected that I would work as if I was getting paid when I wasn't."

Fear of not being able to return/ losing employability or being forgotten about

"Because if I didn't do these things, I wouldn't necessarily be included in work happening in my absence and I'd be forgotten."



"In academia, if you plan to return or continue – it's extremely difficult to create a clean break."

NEUTRAL

The top reasons for respondents taking a more neutral approach to certain activities

Studying whilst on a career break

"I was also doing a postgraduate degree that I continued whilst on leave."

Routine

"The problem isn't the job, it's the routine."



Smoother transition upon returning to work (not driven by fear)

"I stayed engaged with work. But I tightly controlled the things I would do, unlike previous maternity leave breaks."

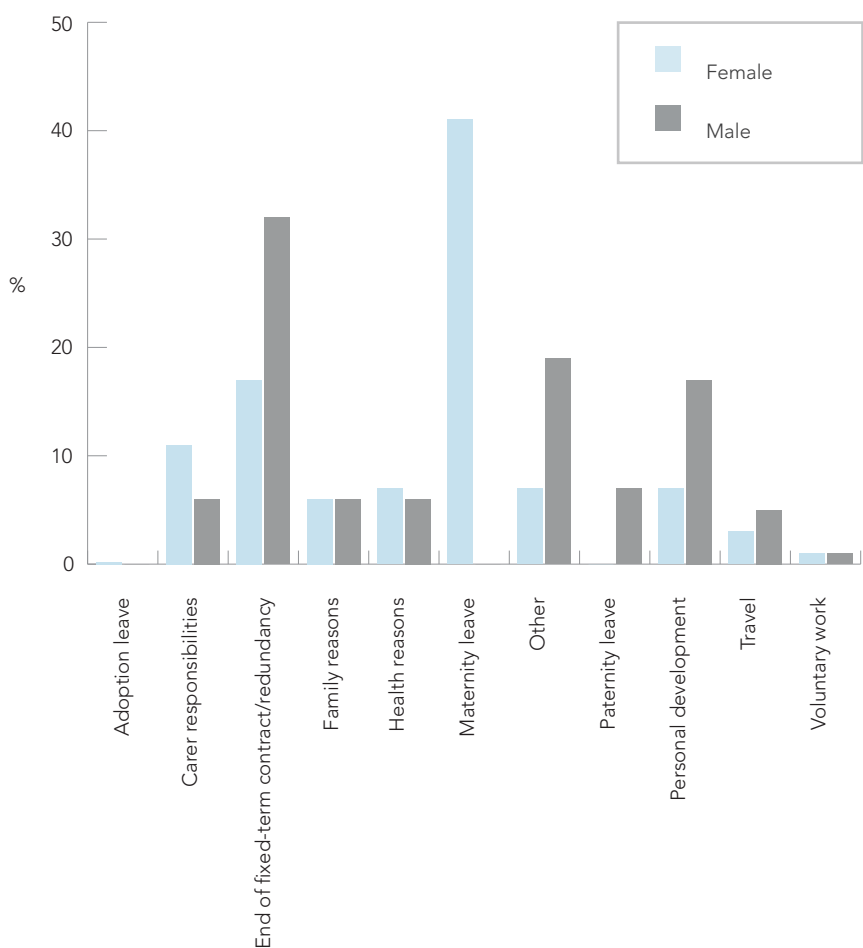
"In a changing field, it's important for me to keep up to date, and connect with my professional interests during a long absence."

8. GENDER AND CAREER BREAKS

The main reason for taking a career break by gender		
	Female	Male
Adoption leave	0.1%	0%
Carer responsibilities	11%	6%
End of fixed-term contract/redundancy	17%	32%
Family reasons	6%	6%
Health reasons	7%	6%
Maternity leave	41%	0%
Other	7%	19%
Paternity leave	0%	7%
Personal development	7%	17%
Travel	3%	5%
Voluntary work	1%	1%

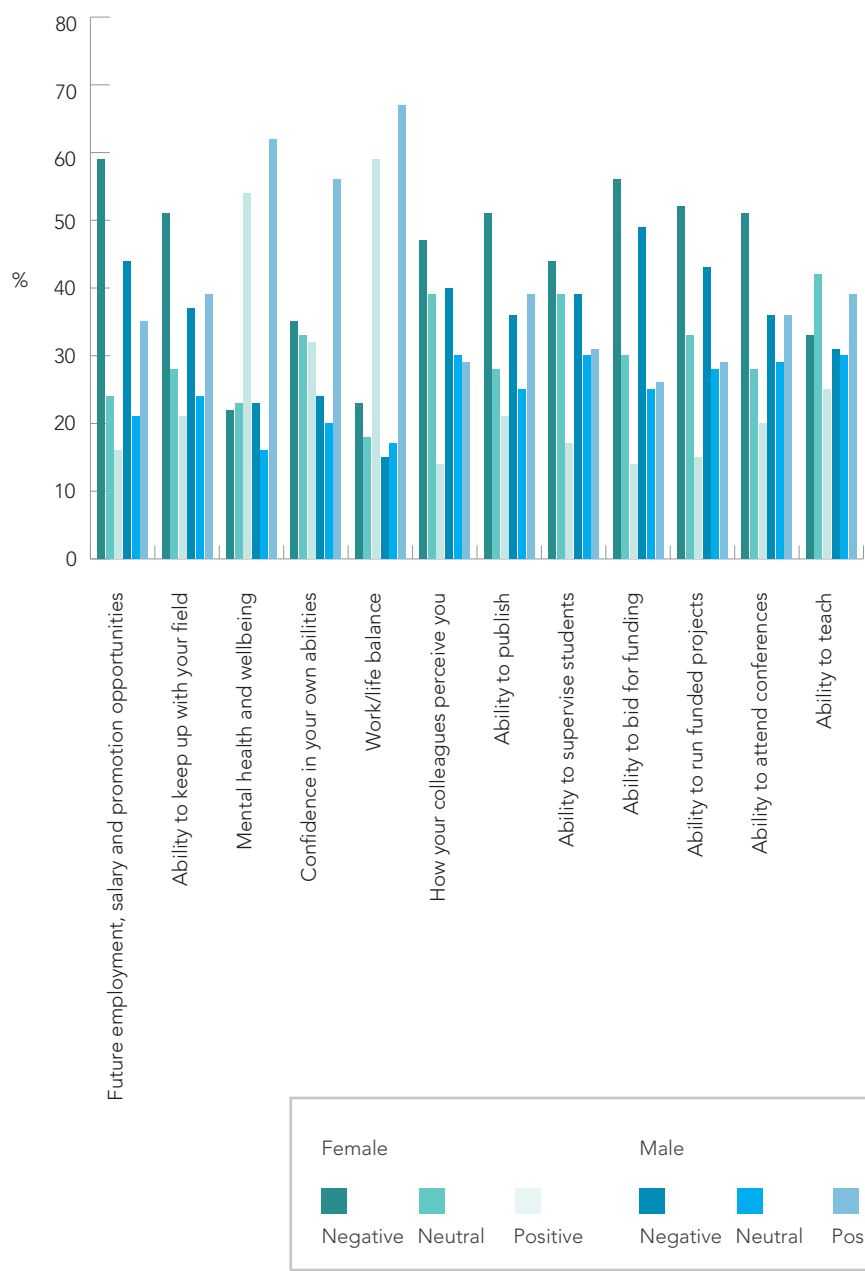
Other reasons given:

- Professional development/study
- Disliked employer
- Burnt out
- Research leave
- Relocation



A summary of perceptions before and after career breaks by gender										
	Very Negative		Negative		Neutral		Positive		Very Positive	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Before career break	13%	14%	31%	21%	30%	25%	17%	24%	9%	17%
After career break	11%	8%	26%	17%	35%	30%	20%	27%	8%	18%

The perceived impact on specific aspects of professional life before taking a career break

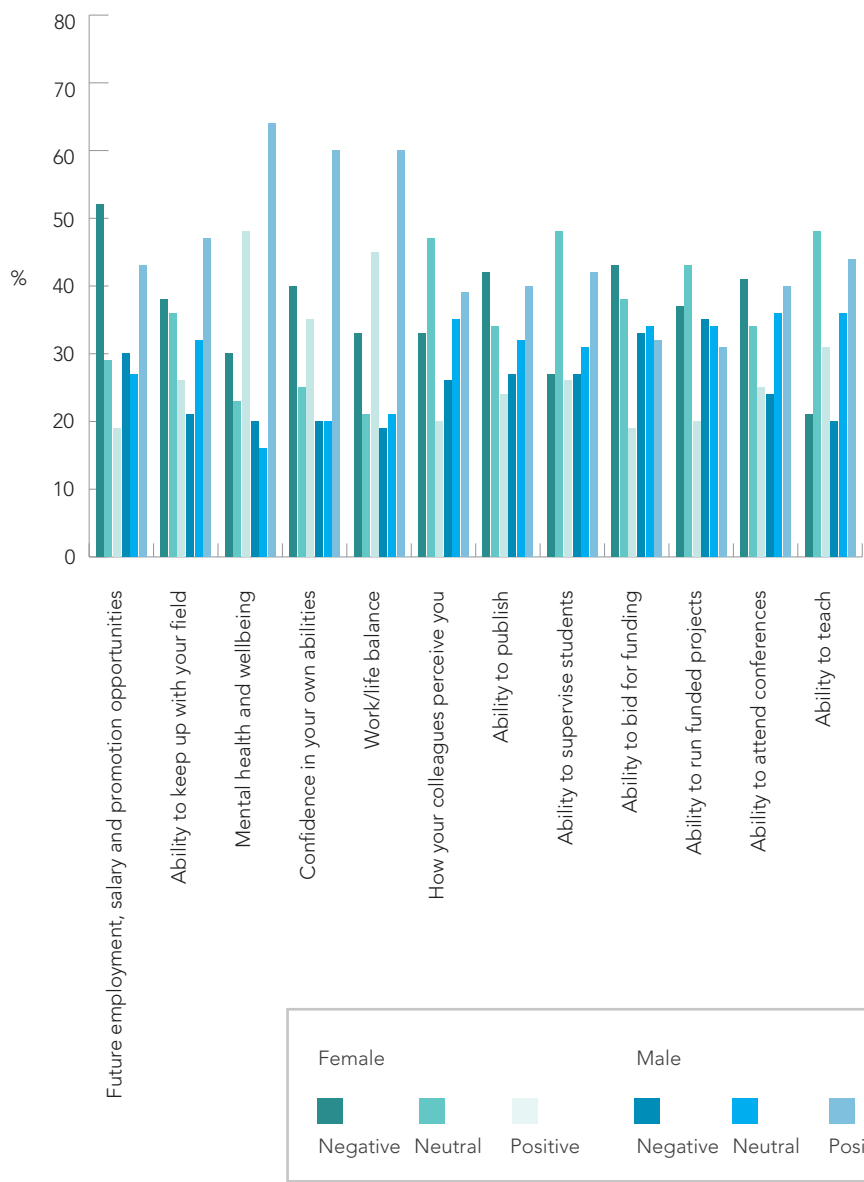




Key findings

- Males had a much more positive perception of career breaks both before and after
- A key difference in perceptions between males and females is the perceived impact a career break would have on their own confidence and abilities. Men felt it would have an overall positive impact, whereas women felt it would be more negative.

The perceived impact on specific aspects of professional life following a career break

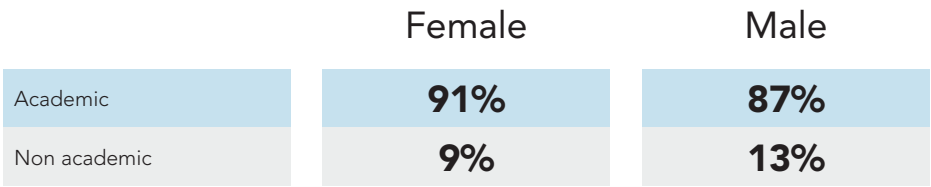


Which gender is more or less likely to return to an academic role after a career break?

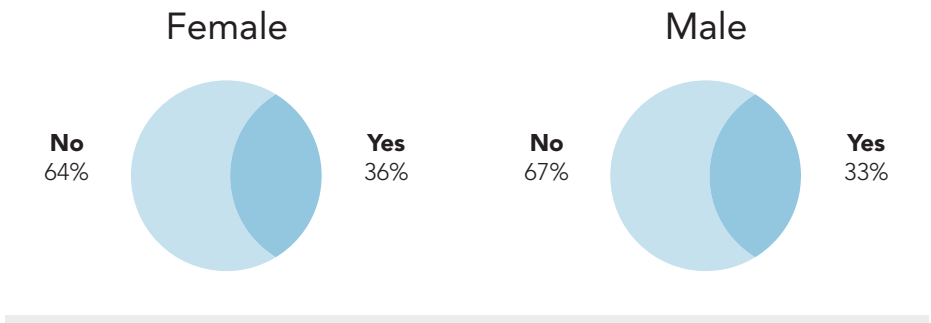
What role did you return to after your most recent career break?	Female	Male
A different research or teaching job with the same employer	13%	15%
A non-research or non-teaching job with a different employer	8%	11%
A non-research or non-teaching job with the same employer	1%	2%
A research or teaching job with a different employer	33%	47%
The same job with the same employer	45%	25%

45%

of females returned to the same job with the same employer.
This may be because employees taking ordinary maternity leave have a right to return to their original job.



Have you had more than one career break?



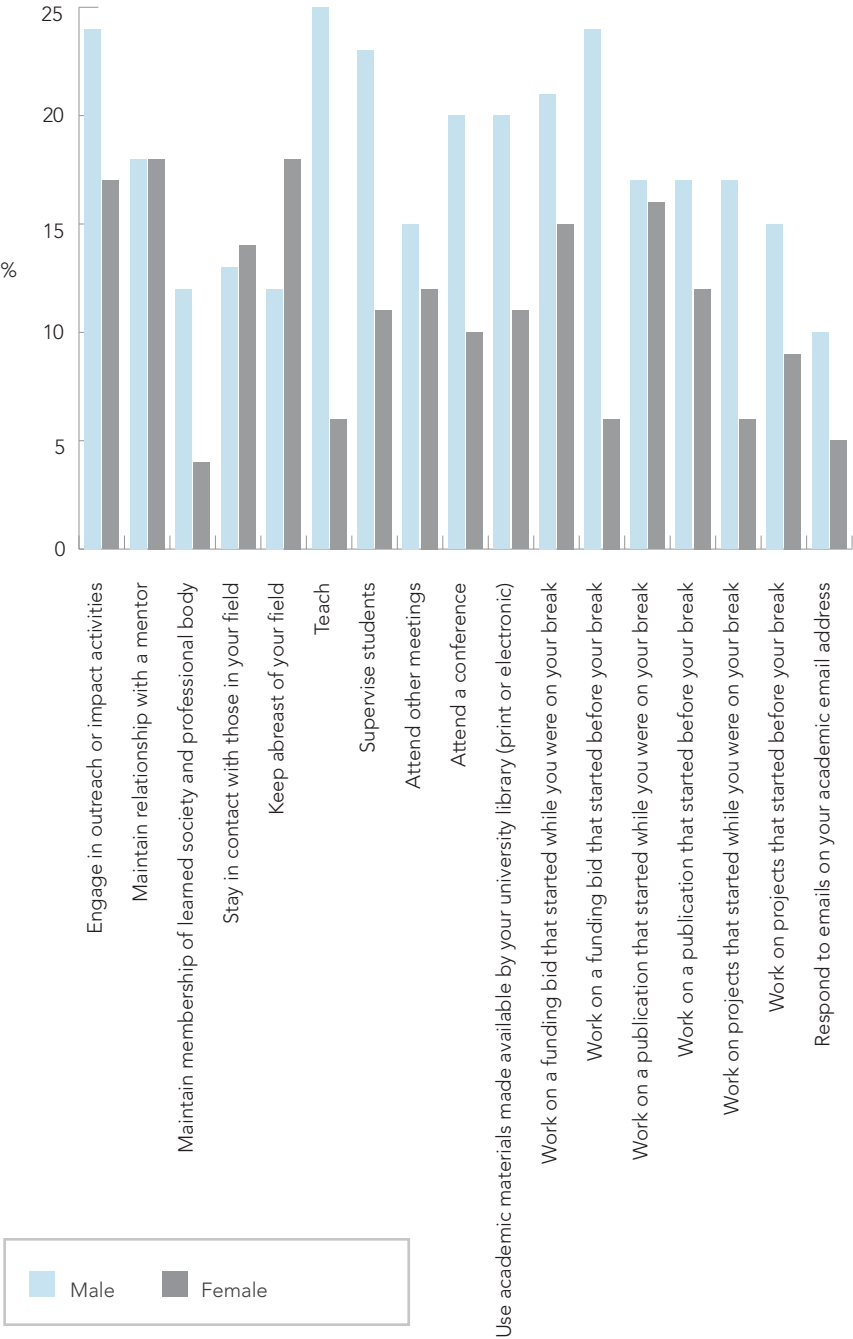
Overall there wasn't a huge difference in terms of the extent of activities carried out based on gender. However the results do differ when you drill down into the preferred activities.

Activities where males were a lot more active than females during their career break	Female	Male
Maintain membership of learned society and professional body	33%	75%
Work on a publication that started while you were on your break	41%	55%
Work on projects that started while you were on your break	19%	49%
Attend a conference	22%	47%
Teach	11%	34%

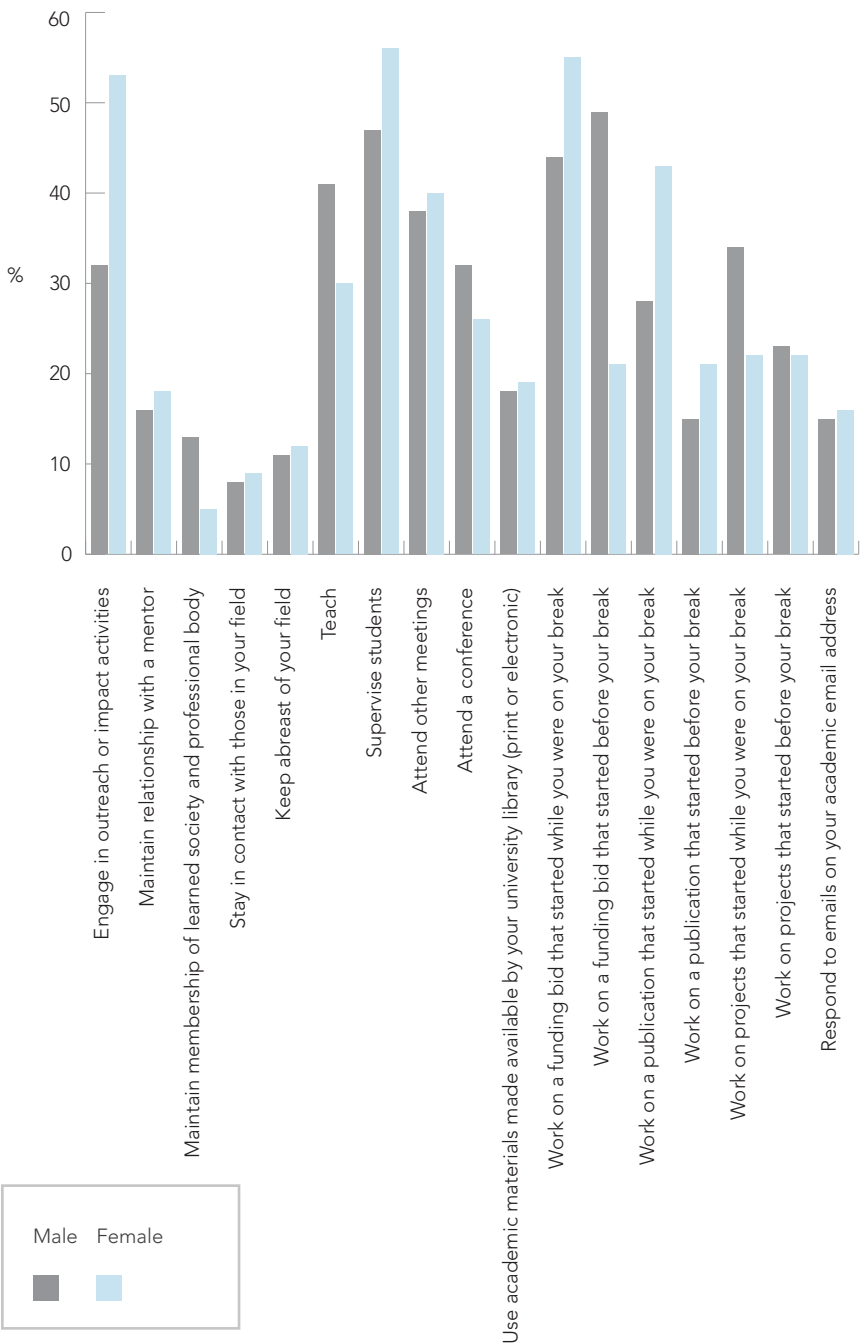
Activities where females seemed more active than males during their career break	Female	Male
Work on projects that started before your break	68%	62%
Use academic materials made available by your university library (print or electronic)	70%	62%

We have to consider here that many of our female respondents may have been busy caring for a newborn baby, which makes it extremely difficult to engage with certain activities. However, when you look at the responses relating to what activities were not done, but were desired to complete – females still seemed more passive than males.

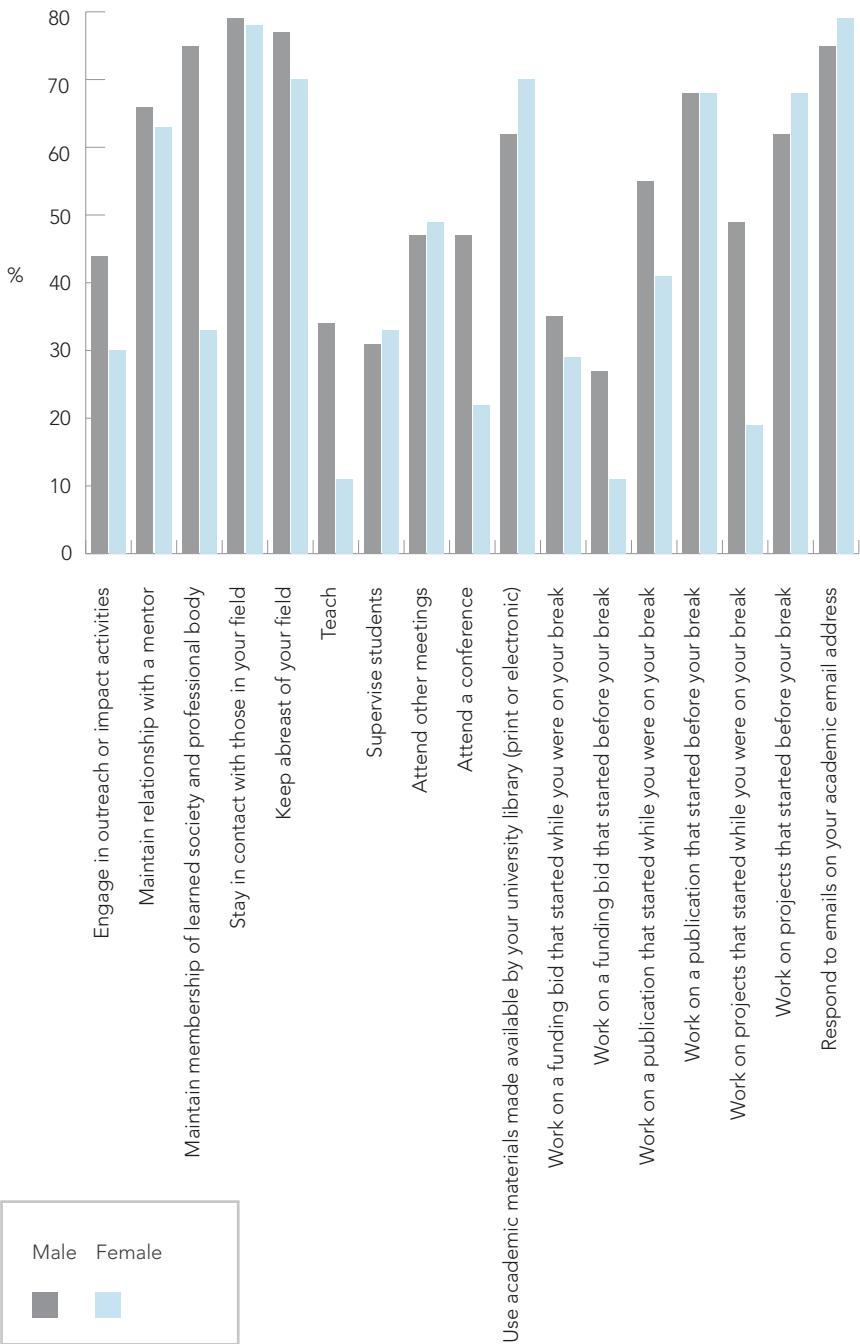
Activities respondents 'wanted to do' during a career break but 'didn't do by gender



Activities that respondents 'didn't do' and 'didn't want to do' by gender



Completed during career break



Considerations for taking a career break by gender

Have you ever taken a career break while working as an academic or researcher?	Female	Male
No	48%	65%
Yes	52%	35%

Many more women have taken career breaks than men.

If not, have you ever considered taking a career break?	Female	Male
No	36%	50%
Yes	64%	50%

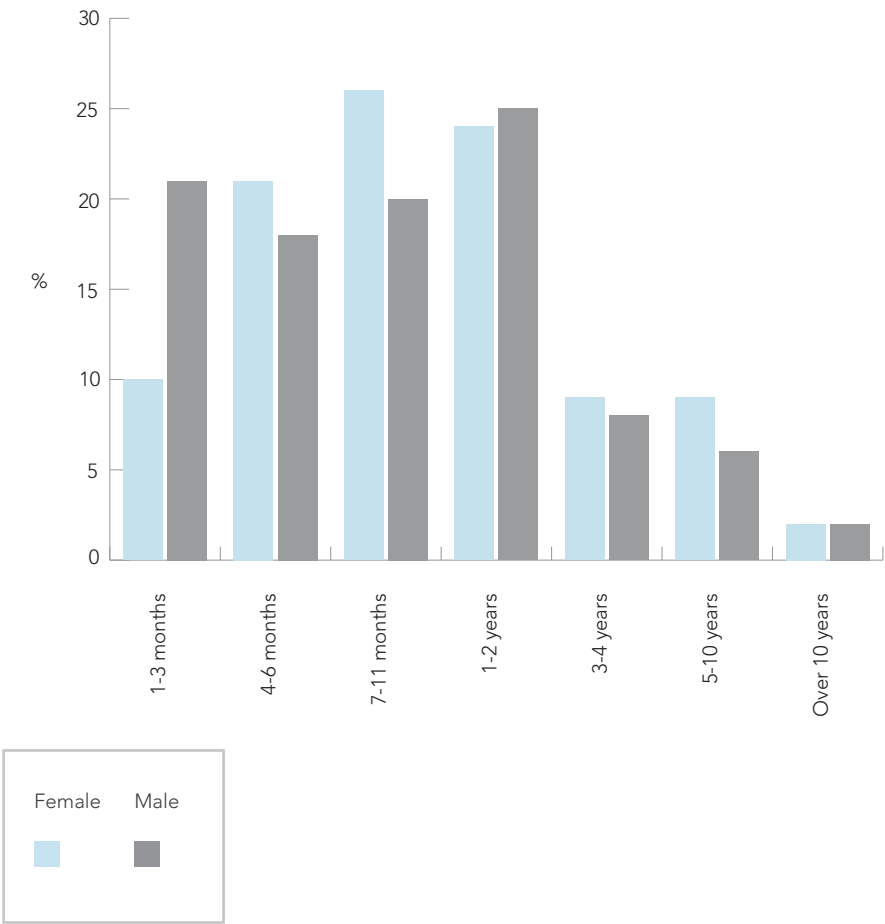
What factors prevented you from taking a career break?	Female	Male
Did not feel confident about being able to return to same job	20%	20%
Not financially viable to take time out	26%	28%
Concerned about how it would look to colleagues	9%	7%
Concerned about how it would look to future employers	17%	15%
Would limit my ability to research, publish, supervise and carry out other academic activities	14%	13%
Worried about losing touch with my colleagues and peers	8%	8%
No sufficiently attractive opportunity	7%	11%

Length of a career break by gender

How long did your most recent career break last?	Female	Male
1-3 months	10%	21%
4-6 months	21%	18%
7-11 months	26%	20%
1-2 years	24%	25%
3-4 years	9%	8%
5-10 years	9%	6%
10+ years	2%	2%



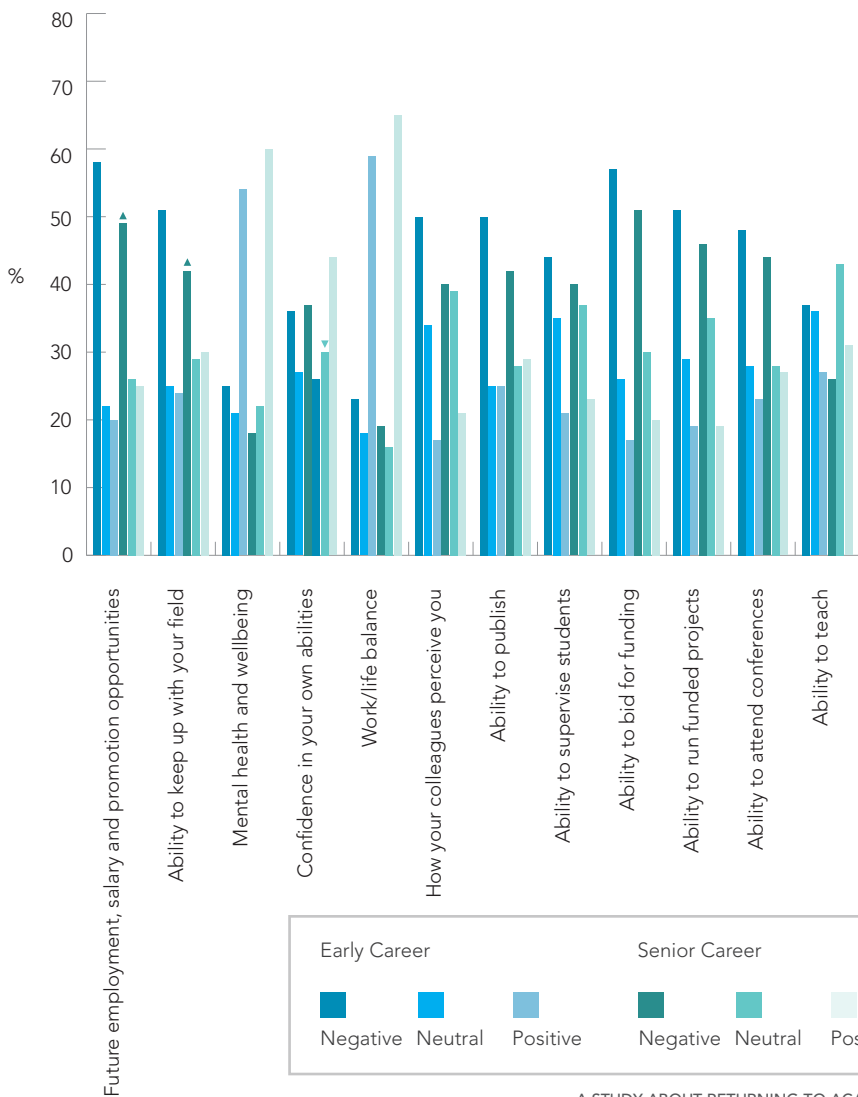
How long did your most recent career break last?



9. CAREER STAGE AND CAREER BREAKS

The perceived impact of taking a career break by career stage

The majority of academics at every stage of the career spectrum believed that a career break would have a positive impact in terms of improving their confidence in their abilities. However those at an early stage of their career were split into two main camps with strong feelings that a career break would have both a negative and positive impact on their careers. A lower number thought it would make no difference.



Early career

They were very worried about their employability, ability to keep up and also how their colleagues may view them. They were a lot more concerned about the negative impact it might have on their career progression.

“I’m an early career researcher. If I don’t do these things I will never get a permanent position.”

“As I’m early on in my academic career and current position I wanted to keep myself updated”

“I’m early in my career. I didn’t really have the luxury to not work on it.”

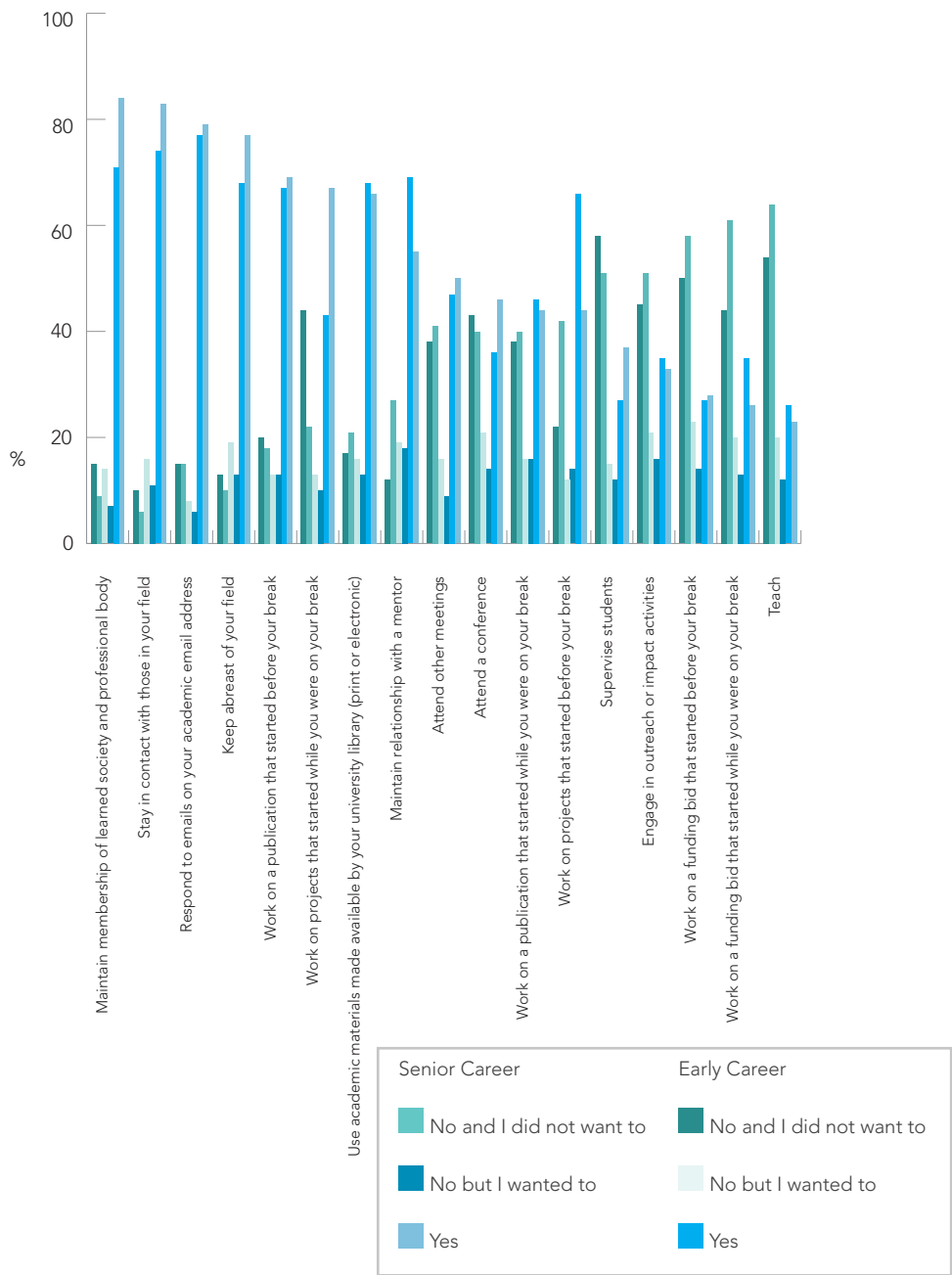
Senior career

Academics here were neutral about the impact a career break would have on their ability to teach. Their main concern was their ability to bid for funding.

“I wanted to continue to work as an academic, so for me it was important to have publications and to apply for funding so I could have another job.”

	Very Positive	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Very Negative
Early career	10%	18%	27%	29%	15%
	29%		27%	44%	
Senior career	12%	21%	30%	26%	11%
	33%		30%	37%	

Completion of activities during career breaks – senior career vs early career



Respondents at both ends of the career spectrum felt the need to keep active with their work while on a career break. They felt the same pressures but for different reasons.

Early career

They were concerned about not being taken seriously and not being given more responsibilities.

“As I’m early on in my academic career and current position I wanted to keep myself updated. I was programme committee member for a conference that had a deadline while I was on leave. I also interviewed for a PhD studentship that I would supervise, as I wanted to be involved in the recruitment.”

Senior career

They were concerned about being forgotten or being seen as non-committal.

“The reality is, when you hit senior grades it’s not possible to take a clean break. If I didn’t do some of the tasks, then projects that I had worked on for years, and which were coming to an end would have faltered. Reputationally I couldn’t allow this to happen. There is so little support or flexibility that if you don’t work to any degree, you quickly get marginalised.”

Activity by career stage – the top choices	Early career	Senior Career
Did do	Stay in contact with those in your field	Maintain membership of learned society and professional body
Didn’t do, but wanted to	Work on a funding bid that started before your break	Maintain relationship with a mentor
Didn’t do and didn’t want to	Supervise students	Teach

Considerations for taking a career break by career stage

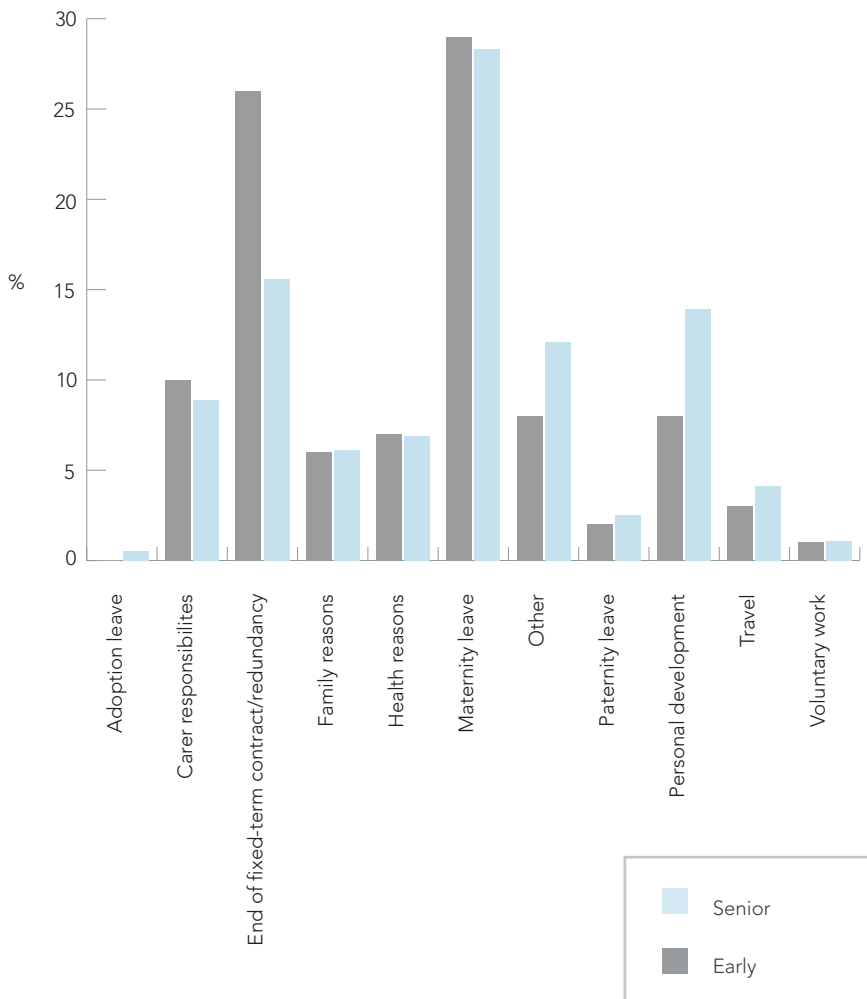
Have you ever taken a career break while working as an academic or researcher?	Early career	Senior Career
No	56%	55%
Yes	44%	45%

The number of career breaks taken by career stage

Have you taken more than one career break?	Early career	Senior Career
No	66%	65%
Yes	34%	35%

The main reason for taking a career break by career stage

What is the main reason for your most recent career break?	Early career	Senior Career
Adoption leave	0%	1%
Carer responsibilities	10%	9%
End of fixed-term contract/redundancy	26%	16%
Family reasons	6%	6%
Health reasons	7%	7%
Maternity leave	29%	28%
Other	8%	12%
Paternity leave	2%	3%
Personal development	8%	14%
Travel	3%	4%
Voluntary work	1%	1%

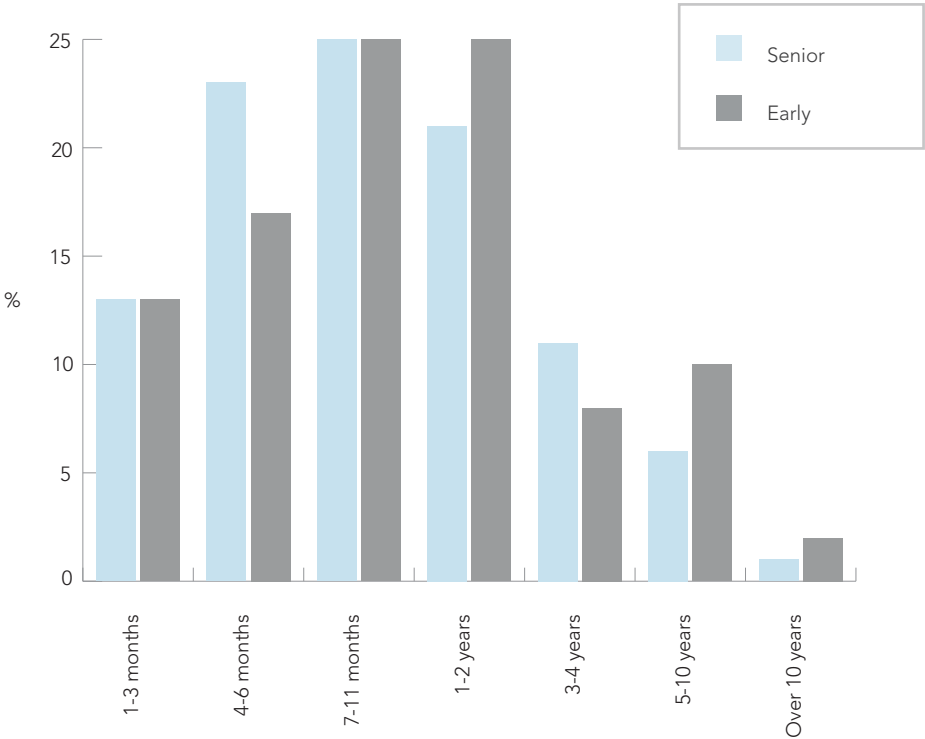


Senior career academics are more likely to take a career break for personal development than early career academics. This may be attributed to senior career academics being more likely to have a permanent role or feeling more secure in their current position.

The length of career break by career stage

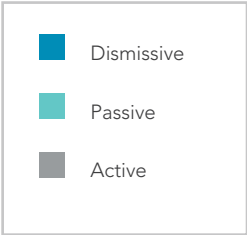
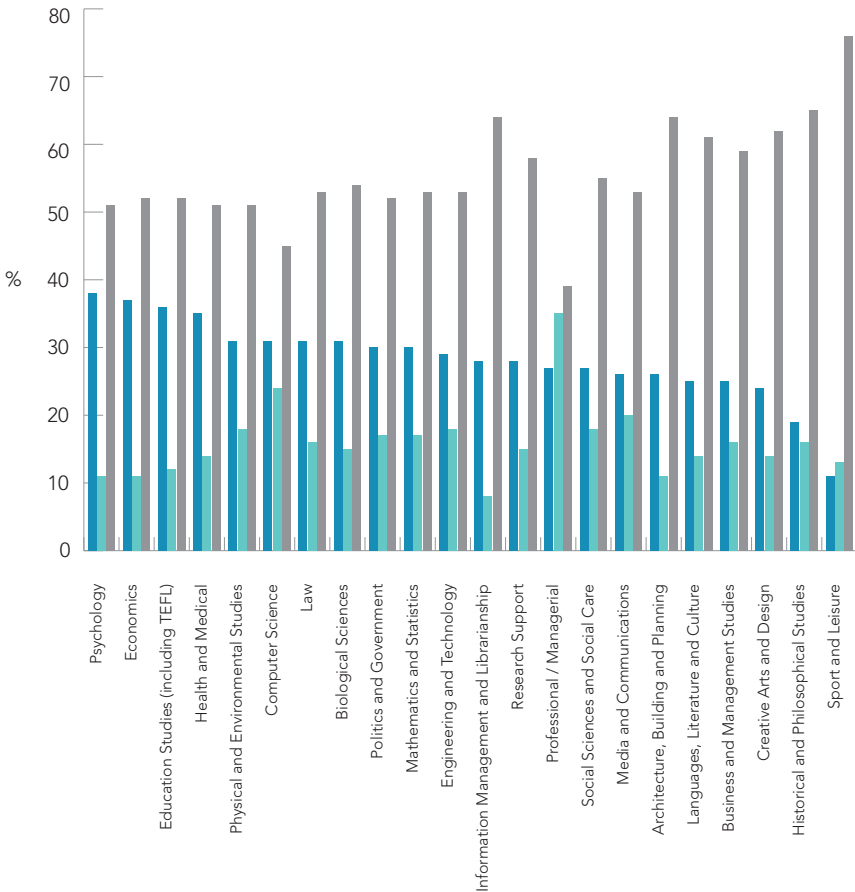
Length of career break	Early	Senior
1-3 months	13%	13%
4-6 months	17%	23%
7-11 months	25%	25%
1-2 years	25%	21%
3-4 years	8%	11%
5-10 years	10%	6%
10+ years	2%	1%

Senior stage careers are more likely to take a shorter break.



10. DISCIPLINE AND CAREER BREAKS

Most active disciplines during a career break



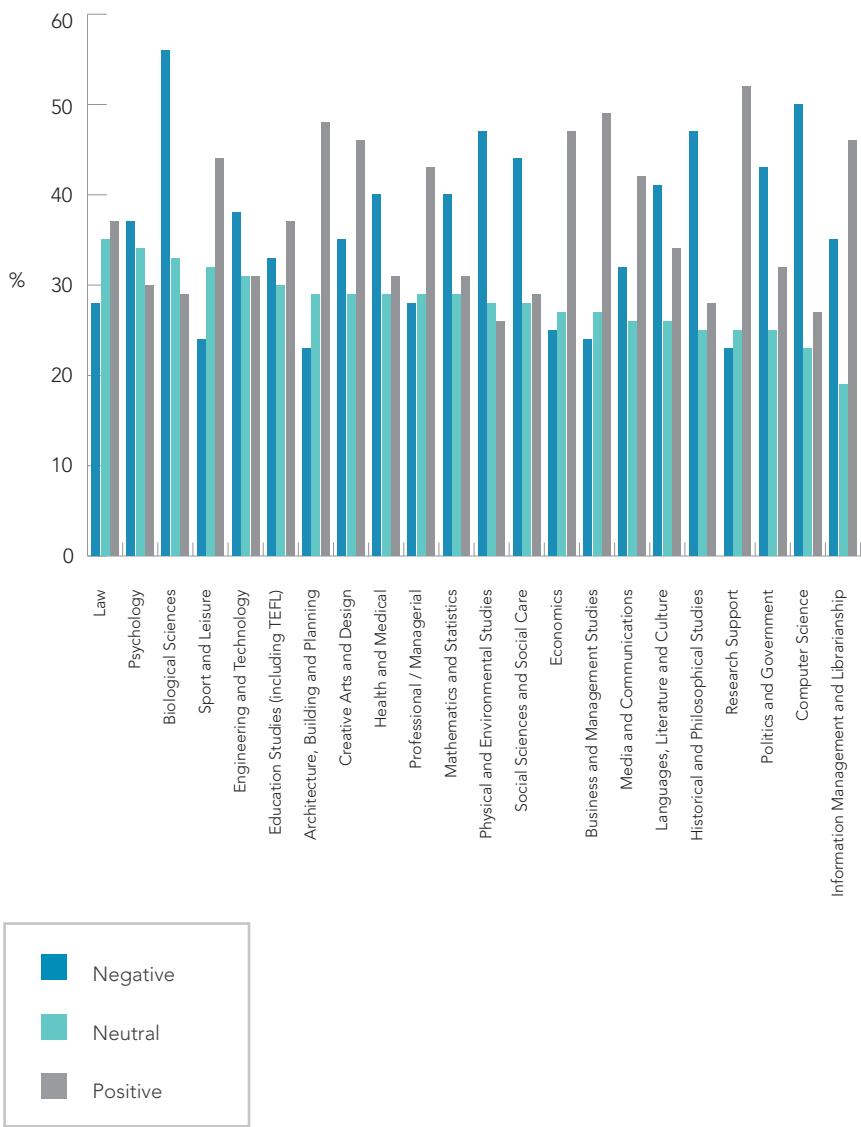
Top 5 most active disciplines whilst on a career break	Active	Most done
Sport & Leisure	76%	Stay in contact with those in your field
Historical & Philosophical Studies	65%	Keep abreast of your field
Information Management & Librarianship	64%	Keep abreast of your field
Architecture, Building & Planning	64%	Stay in contact with those in your field
Creative Arts & Design	62%	Keep abreast of your field

Top 5 disciplines that wanted to do activities but didn't on a career break:	Passive	Most wanted to do, but didn't
Professional / Managerial	35%	Keep abreast of your field
Computer Science	24%	Attend a conference
Media & Communications	20%	Work on projects that started while you were on your break
Engineering & Technology	18%	Work on projects that started while you were on your break
Social Sciences & Social Care	18%	Keep abreast of your field

Top 5 disciplines that didn't do specific activities and didn't want to	Dismissive	Most unwanted and not done
Psychology	38%	Work on a funding bid that started while you were on your break
Economics	37%	Teach
Education Studies (including TEFL)	36%	Teach
Health & Medical	35%	Work on projects that started while you were on your break
Physical & Environmental Studies	31%	Teach



The perceived impact of career breaks by discipline



Top 5 disciplines that had the most negative perception of career breaks	Negative
Biological Sciences	56%
Computer Science	50%
Historical & Philosophical Studies	47%
Physical & Environmental Studies	47%
Social Sciences & Social Care	44%

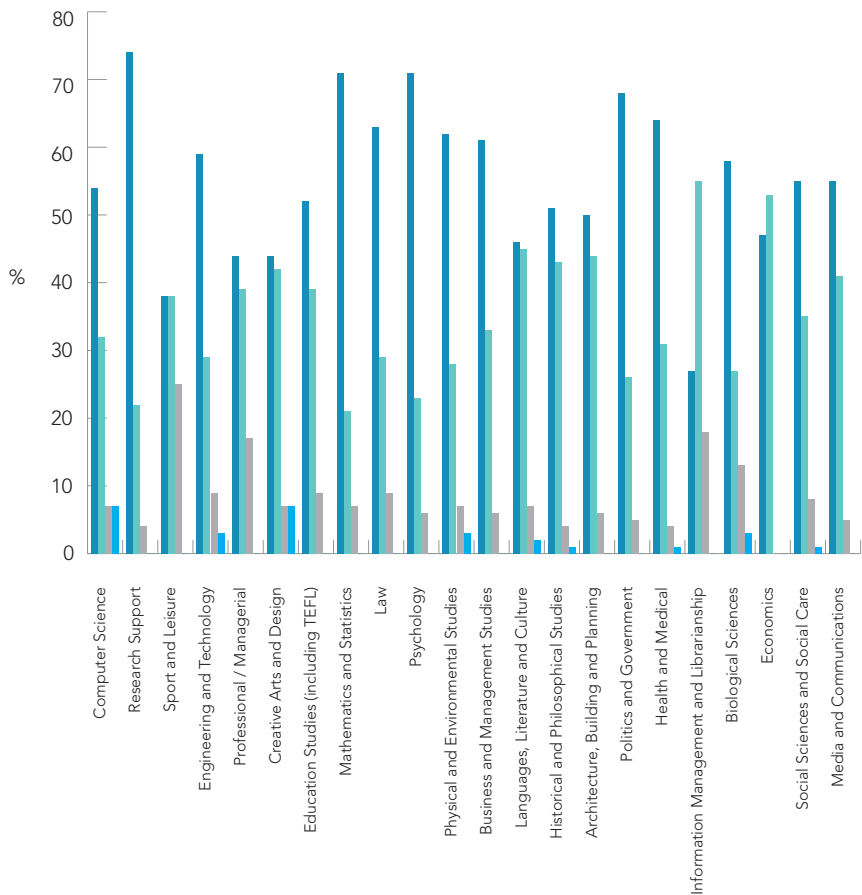
Top 5 disciplines that had the most positive perception of career breaks	Positive
Research Support	52%
Business & Management Studies	49%
Architecture, Building and Planning	48%
Economics	47%
Creative Arts & Design	46%

Top 5 disciplines that had the most neutral perceptions of career breaks	Neutral
Law	35%
Psychology	34%
Biological Sciences	33%
Sport & Leisure	32%
Engineering & Technology	31%

Key findings

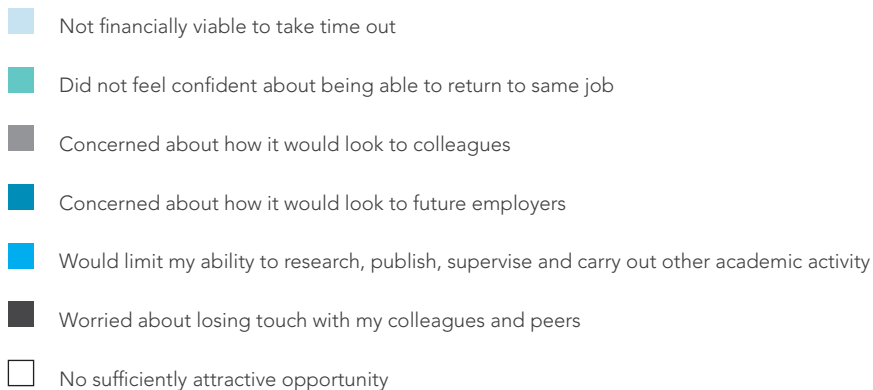
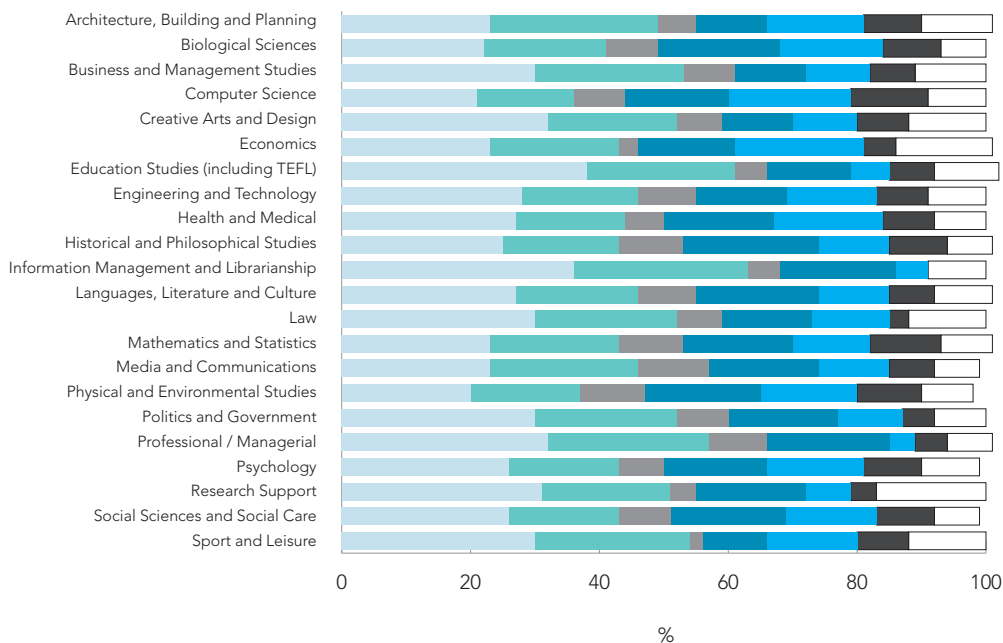
- Science academics and researchers have the most negative perceptions of career breaks.
- They are also the most passive or dismissive when it comes to carrying out job and field related activities whilst on a career break.

Career break length based on discipline



■ 0-11 months
 ■ 1-4 years
 ■ 5-10 years
 ■ Over 10 years

The main reasons for not taking a career break by discipline



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