



Voluntary Severance – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is Voluntary Severance [VS]?

VS is part of the University's normal business processes and has been used effectively for many years. It offers an opportunity for both the University and an individual employee, and is entirely voluntary for both parties.

A 'voluntary severance payment' is any payment in connection with a mutually agreed and voluntary early departure from employment.

VS offers opportunity for some members of staff to leave the University to pursue other career or personal interests as well as providing opportunities for the University.

Is an approach made to all staff asking them to consider VS?

Staff may be approached directly about VS. Staff may also be alerted via Staff News, or local communications that voluntary severance opportunities are available.

VS is entirely voluntary and no pressure will be placed on any individual to apply for voluntary severance. If you have any queries about the process you may contact your local College/ Support Group HR team.

If I am interested, am I guaranteed VS?

There is no automatic right to VS and it will normally only be offered where the University needs to make savings in a specific area.

Often VS is not an option, either because it does not suit individuals' personal circumstances or because it is important to retain the member of staff in the organisation. However, in some situations voluntary severance may be a useful opportunity for both the University and for individuals, depending on the savings that can be achieved and the member of staff's individual circumstances.

If I am interested, how do I enquire about VS?

All staff employed by the University may enquire about VS by making an approach to their manager to discuss/note their interest. Alternatively staff may contact their HR team in confidence. There is no automatic right to a severance package and only cases that are in the University's best interest will be recommended for approval.

Are all staff offered the same financial 'package'?

Financial 'packages' will vary because they are dependent on the needs of the University and the member of staff's individual circumstances.

Can I find out how much I might be offered?

As stated above, packages will vary from person to person and there will need to be a discussion between you, your line manager and HR first. However, you may speak to a member of your HR team in confidence in the first instance.

Is VS available on an ongoing basis?

VS is part of the University's normal business processes and has been used effectively for many years and is expected to continue to be. But availability is dependent on funding being available and certain individual circumstances.

There is currently no central funding identified to support VS. If you have a query about VS in general you should contact your line manager in the first instance, or you may contact your HR team in confidence.

Are staff on external funding eligible for VS?

In principle, yes. However, VS will normally only be offered where the University needs to make savings in a specific area and that would not usually relate to externally funding, so it is less likely that a VS case for an externally-funded member of staff will be in the University's interests.

Can I enquire for VS again if previously refused?

Yes – circumstances change and you can discuss this with your manager at any time but, as ever, there is no guarantee that it will be approved.

Can I reduce my working hours before leaving under VS?

This is not typically covered by the VS arrangements but this is something that can be explored/discussed with your manager.

If not enough people opt for VS, will there be redundancies?

The University is committed to avoiding making compulsory redundancies wherever reasonably possible however if not enough people opt for VS, compulsory redundancies may be required. Other alternatives, e.g. redeployment, would be explored prior to making compulsory redundancies.

What is a Settlement Agreement?

VS agreements will normally be subject to the completion of a 'Settlement Agreement'. A Settlement Agreement is a legally binding agreement, following the agreement of termination of employment. The Settlement Agreement will provide a full breakdown of the 'package' you are receiving. The University pays a contribution of £350 plus VAT towards legal fees incurred solely in connection with the advice received by the member of staff on the terms and effect of entering into the agreement.

What happens once I have been offered VS?

HR will process the appropriate documentation for the offer to proceed. The documents will include details of the terms and conditions discussed and agreed. Once you sign and return the documentation this forms an agreement committing you to acceptance.

What if I indicate interest but then change my mind?

Registering an interest and obtaining a pension estimate (if applicable) is entirely without prejudice, and does not mean you are committed to proceeding with voluntary severance. You can withdraw up to the point of signing the documentation from HR committing yourself to acceptance.

Where can I obtain Financial Advice?

The University cannot promote or endorse individual financial advisors. It can provide details of some organisations that individuals may decide to approach but uptake is entirely at the discretion of the member of staff.

A list of financial advisors can be sourced at www.unbiased.co.uk/ and click on the link to find an IFA.

Does the University pay for independent financial advice?

No.

What happens to my pension entitlement if I take VS?

The University operates/supports various pension schemes and staff wishing to enquire about pension options, in the event that they are considering applying for or accepting a Voluntary Severance offer, should contact the University Pension Office.

If I take VS can I apply to work for the University again in the future?

Re-employment to the same, or essentially the same, job in the same School/Department is not allowed. Normally, re-employment to another job in the University will not be allowed for a specified period (usually 2 years) without repayment of all or part of the VS package. This will be specified in the settlement agreement.

Document History

These FAQs were originally produced in 2009, updated in 2013, updated in July 2017 and again in December 2017.

Alternative Format

If you require this document in an alternative format, including in Word, please contact UHRS@ed.ac.uk or telephone 0131 650 8127.