



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY

Manager's Guidelines on Effectively Managing Maternity/Adoptive Leave

As part of University of Galway's commitment to continuously focus on equality, diversity, and inclusion and providing a supportive environment to our employees, it is important to take proactive steps to embed good practice before, during, and after maternity/adoptive leave. Creating a positive experience of support will help in retaining talented and loyal employees, creating a fairer workplace, and laying the foundation to bridge the gender pay gap.

The transition of going on and returning from maternity/adoptive leave can bring with it challenges that may lead to career derailment when not managed effectively. Fuelling this are negative views, which can be conscious or unconscious, that maternity/adoptive leave is a major disruption to business rather than a brief interlude. Managers who take a longer-term view often signal greater support to employees availing of maternity/adoptive leave, who as a result feel more valued and are far more likely to positively reintegrate into the organisation. Positive experiences around maternity/adoptive leave can lead to a renewed focus on career and a strengthened relationship with the organisation.

Before the employee goes on leave

Managers should arrange a meeting with any member of the team who has indicated that they will avail of maternity/adoptive leave before they go on leave to discuss:

- what duties need to be covered while they are on leave
- whether they would like to maintain some occasional contact while on leave (e.g. to be notified of team building days, job vacancies, etc.)

Managers, and not the person going on maternity/adoptive leave, are responsible for organising cover for the period of leave. For Academic staff members, this would include organisation of supervision cover for PhD students where appropriate.

To arrange cover, the manager should liaise with HR Recruitment (recruit@universityofgalway.ie) as early as possible. Cover may be needed for an extended period, as the staff member taking leave may be entitled to various leave types which they may request as one continuous period, subject to the conditions of the relevant leave policy. These leave types include paid maternity leave (max. 26 weeks) or paid adoptive leave (max. 24 weeks), unpaid maternity leave (max. 16 weeks) or unpaid adoptive leave (max. 16 weeks), parent's leave (max. 9 weeks), and annual leave.

The person going on leave must submit a leave application form to their line manager in the first instance. Application forms are available online [here](#). Following line manager review, the application form must be sent to HR at least six weeks in advance of the start date of the leave (email forms to leaveschemes@universityofgalway.ie).

While the employee is on leave, they are still a member of the team so it is important to discuss the level and means of contact they would like. Reasonable contact between you (line manager) and the employee on leave is encouraged to facilitate any potential work-related issues that may concern them and to discuss their return to work. Some employees will welcome regular contact while others may wish to have minimal contact. The staff member going on maternity/adoptive leave should decide the level of contact they wish to have.

If applicable, information around [health and safety guidelines](#) when working in potentially hazardous environments and/or with chemicals while pregnant should be provided to the employee.

While the employee is on leave

Employees cannot be refused or omitted from access to opportunities for promotion while on leave. Ensure to invite the employee to work events (team gatherings, University-wide events).

Preparing for the employee's return from leave:

The employee must provide written notification at least four weeks in advance of their intention to return.

Once you know the employee's return date, you should arrange a short meeting between you and the employee (in person, or via video or phone). We would recommend this take place at least two weeks before the return date. During this meeting you can devise a plan so the staff member knows what to expect when they return. You should:

- discuss their role and responsibilities (e.g. what their workload will look like upon their return)
- any personnel changes they should be aware of
- what supports the staff member may need to facilitate their reintegration

Note that all terms and conditions of the employment contract continue during maternity/adoptive leave. Where a contract reaches its end date during maternity/adoptive leave, then such terms and conditions will cease on that date. Where employees are still in University employment after their leave, they are entitled to return to the same role they held prior to their leave.

At this stage, it is ideal to discuss any flexible arrangements prior to the employee's return to work. Depending on what is agreed, it should be reviewed regularly to ensure it is working for the employee and the team.

Managers should make the staff member aware of supports they can avail of upon their return including "[Maternity Matters](#)" workshops and [post-extended-leave grants](#) (Research Grant for Returning Academic Carers, Research Capacity Building Grant, and Research Consolidation Grant) offered by the Office of the Vice President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (OVPEDI).

Advise the team of the employee's return to work and encourage that they join you in welcoming them back.

Ensure that a workstation is ready for their return (or advise them of any desk booking system that you may have in place), along with their computer/laptop and any login information or security passes.

Employees are legally entitled to time off work, without reduction in pay, for up to one hour every day to either breastfeed or express breastmilk, up to two years following the birth of a baby. If an employee requires this, please ensure they have any facilities necessary (i.e. point them in the direction of the nearest room/make an office available to them to breastfeed or express breastmilk; they will also need a fridge where they can store the milk). A map of on-campus family friendly facilities is available on the [Buildings and Estates Office website](#). Staff members should also be made aware that University of Galway has a staff breastfeeding group that they may join if they wish.

When the employee returns from leave

Often a returning employee can have feelings of anxiety and concerns about coping with new responsibilities combined with the possible stress of leaving their child. It is important that they feel welcomed back and are supported by you and the team. A smooth return to work could be managed by enabling a phased return, which can involve returning mid-week, which eases the employee back into work and includes a period of handover from their maternity/adoptive cover. Please note that any such arrangement should be discussed with HR prior to taking place.

NOTE: In the event of a return from maternity leave following the loss or serious illness of the child, please work with your HR Partner on devising a suitable, supportive and sensitive plan.

You are advised to hold a short return-to-work induction meeting with the employee, where you:

- Welcome them back – provide an encouraging return to their working environment, letting them know you are glad to have them back
- Provide updates – cover any crucial developments which occurred while they were away
- Consider reasonable adjustments – you should discuss any changes they consider appropriate for their return to work
- Develop a return-to-work plan – it is sometimes best to phase the employee back into work, so consider how you can do this to avoid any unnecessary stress by clarifying goals and objectives for the first few months, and please discuss any such plans with HR
- Talk through transitions and handovers if the employee holds important committee roles and/or Programme Directorships
- Provide support – let them know you are available to support them in their successful return
- Provide guidance on the various leave options that can be availed of after the maternity/adoptive leave period including parent's leave, parental leave, annual leave, etc.
- Reassure the employee – if they are having concerns (about their confidence, guilt, abilities, etc.), reassure them that these are common concerns shared by many new parents
- Take time – encourage the employee to take time to settle back into the work routine and not to expect it all to be perfect immediately
- Let them ask questions – allow them time to discuss any concerns they may have, identify any training needs, and ask any questions they have
- Follow-up – schedule regular check-ins to check how everything is going; we would recommend a meeting at least 2 months after their return to see how they are settling back in
- If employee is working in a hybrid style, ensure they are provided with the relevant policy
- Discuss any upskilling that the staff member may wish to do if they have been away for an extended period; time should be allowed in the staff member's Workload Allocation Model should such upskilling be required

Arrange a team lunch/coffee catch up which will provide an opportunity for them to meet with everyone, introduce any new team members, and re-establish social contacts.

Assign a “buddy”: this can be a hugely useful resource for a parent returning from leave (especially a first-time parent). The returning parent can draw on the experiences of a fellow employee who has been back at work for a longer period and can share their learnings, or who is just a buddy in the team who can help the employee to get up to speed with any new processes or changes that have been implemented (in the team, unit, or University).

Additional resources

EDI Courses

- Maternity Matters Ramp Up Session (bi-annual) – a 3-hour interactive and practical online workshop designed to help prepare and support new parents in adjusting back to the workplace following maternity/adoptive leave
- Managing Inclusively – a training programme aimed at line managers and supervisors. It is normally 2 hours long and aims to provide management and leadership advice on:
 - How to create a culture that values and supports all staff, inclusive of external responsibilities
 - How to support employees with caring responsibilities and manage transitions from leave back to work

Maternity Leave Policy

Adoptive Leave Policy

Parent’s Leave Policy

Parental Leave Policy

Carer’s Leave Policy

Hybrid Working Policy

Flexible Working Policy

OVPEDI Post-Extended-Leave Research Grants



Latest review date: October 2024