

# Support for Employees taking Family Related Leave Guidelines

## 1. Introduction

UCD is made up of a wide range of people with diverse backgrounds and circumstances. This includes those who have family obligations and may be returning from maternity, adoptive or carers leave. UCD is committed to providing an inclusive workplace for all our employees. Forty percent of respondents to UCD's Culture and Engagement Survey 2018 identify as carers, the majority of which have a child or children under 18. Strategic objective 5 of UCD's strategy 2015-2020 is to attract and retain an excellent and diverse cohort of students, faculty and staff. Supporting Carers is also a key action under the UCD EDI Strategic Action plan. The provision of supports to employees to balance family commitments enabling them to reach their full potential at work will support the achievement of these strategic objectives.

This guidance document provides a roadmap to enable employees who are parents and carers to continue to develop in their careers whilst also balancing their family commitments. This guidance is also designed to assist managers to support their employees and raise awareness around the options that are available to them.

## 2. UCD Family-Friendly Policies

UCD has a range of family friendly policies to support those with caring responsibilities. Employees should make themselves familiar with these policies so that they consider all of the options that may support them in their role as carers. Managers should also ensure that they are aware of the range of policies available so that they can support their employees and inform them of their options. The following is a list of policies that employees may avail of in UCD that support them to balance their work and family life.

- Adoptive Leave [Link](#)
- Maternity Leave [Link](#)
- Paternity Leave [Link](#)
- Career Break [Link](#)
- Carers Leave [Link](#)
- Parental Leave [Link](#)
- Shorter Working Year [Link](#)
- Job Sharing [Link](#)

Research support for faculty returning from leave is set out in section 4.5 of this document. Managers and employees should familiarise themselves with the conditions and procedures applying to leaves (e.g. 'Maternity Leave Procedures') on the HR website.

### **3. Communication and Engagement**

It is essential that employees who have caring responsibilities and their managers engage in discussions to see how employees can be supported to achieve work-life balance. These discussions are essential if an employee is considering taking a form of family friendly leave. The lines of communication should ideally continue whilst the employee is on leave (as per the employees wishes) and after they return. Good communication with the employee throughout this period will make the employee feel valued and supported and more likely that they will return to work. The following are guidelines around the types of conversations that should take place before and during leave.

#### **3.1 Before Leave**

Best practice suggests that employees should approach managers to inform them they will require leave or are considering taking leave. Managers should have a supportive and open conversation with the employee, and it is important that both employee and manager maintain on-going communications throughout this period. Please consult the relevant policies for information on when to let your manager know you are taking leave.

Scheduled meetings with the employee to ensure a smooth transition should take place covering the handover if the employee is being replaced and sharing information with the team. (See section on 'Handover' below)

Employees should establish with their manager in advance of going on leave the level of contact they wish to receive while on leave. There is no obligation for employees to maintain contact during this time, it is the employee's decision. Where employees opt to be contacted and if agreeable with the employee, managers should schedule 2-3 calls to inform employees of recent developments and to keep them up to date on what is happening in the organisation. Managers should arrange to meet with the employee 4-6 weeks before

the employee's expected return, to discuss their role, changes in the team and major organisational changes. This may take the form of a meeting or a call depending in the employees wishes.

### **Marking the Final Day**

Managers should organise a team gathering with refreshments. It is important to mark this day and recognise the employee's contribution to the team and to enhance their sense of belonging and their sense of value to the team.

### **Handover**

Managers should work with the employee to facilitate a handover. The following steps below will support the handover period:

- **Review the Job Description:** review the key elements of the role that need to be continued whilst the employee is on leave.
- **Job Cover:** In 2017, UCD introduced a social levy that Schools/Units contribute to annually to fund maternity/adoptive leave. This ensures Schools/Units incorporate leave funding into their budget on an annual basis and spreads the cost evenly across the university. It also enables managers to replace the person whilst they are on maternity leave so that their work is continued on for the period of leave.

Before leave there should be an adequate handover period between the person covering the role and the employee going on leave and similarly an overlap when the employee returns from leave to facilitate handover.

Often employees covering a role will need to secure new employment and this may leave managers with a gap and/or inadequate handover for the returning employee.

It is important to ensure that the person covering the role has completed a handover for the employee returning or if they cannot do this it should be carried out with the Head of School.

- **Act transparently:** Making decisions or assumptions regarding an employee's projects because they will be on leave or about projects that may not be completed until after the employee has gone on leave can upset employees. It is important that discussions around these projects take place before the employee goes on leave.
- **Adequate time** needs to be set aside for recruitment of the replacement post.
- **Keep the Employee Updated:** meet with the employee who will be taking leave to discuss these arrangements prior to sharing with the team and how their work will be covered during their leave.

### **3.2 During Leave**

Where it is agreed, employees should be contacted at the arranged times during their leave. The onus is on the manager to maintain contact as per the scheduled times. If the manager moves to a new role, the employee should be notified, and managers should ensure the new manager carries out the scheduled contact.

Managers and staff should meet/ have a call 4-6 weeks before the employees expected return to confirm return to work date and to discuss the employee's role before their return to work.

## **4. Framework for Returning to Work**

Managers play a critical role in supporting employees returning from leave. Returning to work and balancing work responsibilities can be a stressful time for employees with caring responsibilities. The following is a framework to guide managers in supporting the employee on their return to work.

### **4.1 Returning to work**

- Communicate the employee's return date to the team and ensure the employee's workstation is ready for their return.
- Invite the employee to start work later on the first day back.

- Schedule a coffee break in advance with the team to welcome back the employee on the first day.
- Ensure the employee is included in team meetings and group emails etc.

#### **4.2 Mini-induction**

- Meet with the employee to update them on their role, new and existing relevant policies and practices and any other relevant information.
- Inform the employee of policies they could avail of e.g. parental leave etc.
- Pregnancies, adoptions and caring responsibilities result in significant changes to a person's life. It is important to offer a non-judgemental ear, be understanding and inform the employee of supports. Examples include:
  - Buddy programme connecting UCD employees who have caring responsibilities [Link](#)
  - Breast-feeding facilities/reduced working hours to facilitate expressing milk: [Link](#) Contact the SIRC Office on Ext 2070 or [sirc@ucd.ie](mailto:sirc@ucd.ie) for further details
  - Reasonable accommodations (ConnectAbility) [Link](#)
  - Employee assistance programme (EAP) [Link](#)

#### **4.3 Check-ins**

- Schedule regular check-ins: (week two, week four and once monthly for the next five months) This is an informal meeting to ensure the employee is settling back well, address any issues that may have arisen since their return to work and to see if any accommodations are needed.
- Try to ensure a 2-4 week overlap between the person covering the role and the employee returning from leave to facilitate handover. Often employees covering a role will need to secure new employment and this may leave managers with a gap and/or inadequate handover for the returning employee. Ensure that the person covering the role has completed a handover for the employee returning. If they cannot do this with the employee returning, this should be carried out with the Head of School/Unit.

- Parents and carers may request different work arrangements on return to work such as a change in work hours, part-time work, flexible working, shorter working year etc. Managers should consider this if it is operationally possible.
- Parents may request parental leave.

#### **4.4 Develop Workplan**

- Discuss and agree workplan with employee
- Schedule weekly meetings with employee regarding workplan
- Schedule a P4G conversation to discuss career development. Let the employee decide if they wish to have an interim career development conversation if their annual P4G conversation date has passed while on leave.

#### **4.5 Research Support for Faculty Returning from Maternity, Adoptive and Carer's Leave**

UCD will facilitate faculty returning from maternity leave to support a phased increase in teaching activity over the course of the first calendar year following their return, typically averaging 50% commitment over that year. This is to support employees to re-engage with the University and to re-establish their research outputs.

All faculty returning from maternity and adoptive leave can avail of this support. This applies to carers who take leave for 24 weeks or more.

The practical implementation of this support will depend on the person's workload and a discussion will be required between the employee returning from maternity leave and their Head of School in terms of implementation. For example, where there is a requirement to undertake two modules, the employee can apply to undertake 50% of this teaching allocation i.e. one module. Where there is a requirement to carry out one module, a discussion will need to take place as to how a reduction in teaching will work in this instance. Likewise, if the teaching requirement is three modules, 50% is 1.5 modules and agreement will need to be reached as to how this would work in practice.

## 5. Performance for Growth Conversation

Performance for Growth (P4G) conversations take place annually from mid-April to end-June. If the employee is on family related leave when P4G conversations are due to take place i.e. mid-April to end-June, the conversation should be scheduled as soon as possible after the Reviewee returns to normal duties. If an employee is due to take family related leave during the annual P4G cycle the P4G conversation can be scheduled in the normal manner i.e. mid-April to end-June, with objectives and development planning adjusted to relate to timeframe up to the commencement of the leave.

## 6. Relevant Legislation

Carer's Leaver Act 2001 [Link](#)

Disability Act 2005 [Link](#)

Employment Equality Act 1998-2015 [Link](#)

Equal Status Act 2000-2015 [Link](#)

Maternity Protection Act 1994 and 2004 [Link](#)

Paternity Leave and Benefit Act 2016 [Link](#)

Parental Leave Act 1998 [Link](#)

**For more information go to UCD's Parents and Carers webpage:**

<https://www.ucd.ie/equality/support/supportsforparentsandcarers/>

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