

# Managers' Guide to Return from Parental Leave

## A checklist of things to consider



### Return from Parental Leave: Planning for success

ECU recognises that returning to work after parental leave can be challenging, professionally and personally. Manager support is critical to a successful return and reigniting a career.

This checklist helps guide managers on how best to support staff members on their return. Some initial discussions will have happened before parental leave started. Keeping lines of communication open during leave is key to a successful return.

#### While staff member is on parental leave:

*What to consider:*

- Keep in touch as agreed, whether it be by email or by phone. ECU staff generally continue to have access to their staff email account whilst on parental leave (though they are not expected to check it).
- Be conscious of workplace issues (e.g. change management) that arise during parental leave of which the staff member may need to be informed. This helps limit unexpected surprises on their return.
- 'Keeping In Touch' days are a useful tool for staying informed of workplace activities or projects, particularly as the expected return date draws near. Inviting them to attend training or team planning days are just two examples of how these can be used.
- Invite them to any social events your team or area may have. They may not wish or be able to attend but it is nice to be asked and helps combat feeling disconnected or isolated.
- Encourage the staff member to read ***'Returning to Work after Parental Leave: A guide for ECU staff'*** and visit ***'Working parents at ECU'*** on ECU's Staff Intranet site. These resources will help inform them about what to consider when planning their return to work and the parenting facilities and support available.
- Remember: the staff member is entitled to return to their position they held prior to taking parental leave, (except in specific circumstances outlined in the *ECU Enterprise Agreement 2017 and the Parental Leave Policy (PL188)*).

*Things for you to consider:*

- Based on discussions, set up some reminders in your calendar for keeping in touch as agreed.
- Ensure Payroll Services are immediately notified of any changes to return dates (including if the staff member decides not to return).
- If necessary, seek advice from your HR Business Partner if specific issues occur during parental leave.

## **Nearing return from parental leave** *(approx. eight weeks before)*

### *What to discuss:*

- Have the staff member confirm the actual date they will return to work – this should be in writing at least eight weeks prior to the agreed return date (an email is fine). Notify Payroll Services of any date changes immediately.
- They may want to return on a different basis to what they worked before going on parental leave so discuss the hours of work/academic workload they would like to return to (remembering full-time staff can return on a part-time basis for up to three years and then revert to full-time).
- Flexibility is likely to be high on the staff member's list of priorities so take the time to explore the possible options with them. Together review the information on flexible work arrangements (including employee and manager checklists) on the [HRSC intranet site](#) and consider a trial period to see which options are viable.
- Discuss what support will assist in bringing them up to speed on their return, regardless of their role or level of seniority. Encourage them to consider a 'buddy' arrangement (similar to that provided to a new employee), preferably with someone else who has past experience of returning from parental leave.
- Ensure they are aware of the [ECU Athena SWAN parenting rooms](#). These are equipped with a fridge, sink, armchair, microwave and table as well as providing breastfeeding staff with a private place to express milk, if required.

### *Things for you to consider*

- Start planning for their first day in a similar way you would for a [new employee](#). Confirm the necessary system and building access are still in place as well as the necessary workstation / office arrangements.
- Plans may need to change due to factors beyond the employee's control - try to understand the situation and talk through the options to accommodate these at the earliest opportunity.

## **The first week and regular check-ins**

### *What to discuss:*

- Take some time on their first day to help them to re-orientate. Manage the first day very similar to how you would induct a new employee. Allow them time to catch up and get back up to speed – ensure necessary handovers are scheduled with the relevant team members.
- Set a time to discuss and develop a new MPS plan focussing on establishing new objectives and priorities. It also provides a good opportunity to discuss career aspirations and build a career development plan.
- For those with specific career aspirations, encourage them to consider finding a mentor. Mentors can be particularly supportive by offering long-term career advice and inspiration.
- Meet with them for regular 1:1 meetings during the first couple of months to help them settle in to a new routine, particularly if they are a first time parent.

### *Things for you to consider*

- Identify what development opportunities (e.g. projects, acting opportunities) will support their career aspirations and re-establish their desired career momentum. The [ECU Athena SWAN Advancement Scheme](#) is one funding source for conference attendance or specific professional development.

## **Remember**

*Consider your biases around work and family - the way you act creates the environment that supports employees to thrive. It helps to be aware of your values and assumptions around work and family so as not to unfairly influence what your employee considers is going to work for them and their situation.*