Being on and returning from parental or carer’s leave

A PLANNING AND CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR TEAM MEMBERS
Welcome

Macquarie University is committed to helping employees who have caring responsibilities, integrate their work demands with their personal life and have a fulfilling and rewarding career.

If you’ve taken time out from work to care for a new baby; young children; an elderly parent; or a family member with a disability, illness or chronic medical condition, this planning and conversation guide will help you navigate through the various decisions and actions you may be taking as you prepare to return to work. There’s a separate guide for managers, so that together you can best plan for a smooth transition.

The guide is intended to be read in conjunction with the information and relevant policies on the University’s Carer’s Hub website, including:

- leave and other provisions
- support and resources
- carer stories
While on leave

STAYING IN TOUCH
How connected you want to be with your team while you’re on leave is your choice. It’s beneficial to have a conversation about this with your manager prior to your leave; however, if this wasn’t possible, you can still speak with them after your leave commences. It’s okay if these arrangements need to change because of your family circumstances – just let your manager know when you can.

Some people find that they feel isolated when they’re on parental or extended carer’s leave, so it can be good to stay in touch with your manager and co-workers. The choice about how and when you’re contacted is yours. There are certain things the University needs to contact you about, like restructures or relocations that might impact you on your return to work. Things to consider include:

- What you want to be kept informed about. Do you wish to be kept up to date about major changes taking place or projects you’re involved with? Would you like to be invited to team social events? Do you want to be sent staff communications or be informed about professional development courses? The choice is yours but be clear with your manager about what will work best for you.

- Your preferred way of keeping in touch. Do you want to receive a phone call, or would you prefer a check-in via email or text message? You may also want to ask a colleague to keep you across any developments in the team and the University more broadly.

- For new parents, under the Australian Government Keeping in Touch Days Scheme, employees on unpaid parental leave will be paid to participate in activities such as planning days, training or conference attendance, up to a maximum of 10 days. The scheme aims to facilitate a smooth return to work for new parents; however, employees aren’t obliged to take part in any work activities while on parental leave.

EXTENDING YOUR PARENTAL LEAVE OR RETURNING EARLY
Should anything unforeseen impact your agreed leave arrangements, flexibility is built into the leave process to meet any changes to your needs. If your circumstances change, let your manager know as soon as you’re able to. If you have questions or concerns, speak with your HR Client Team representative.

PLANNING YOUR RETURN FROM PARENTAL LEAVE
Professional staff: you are entitled to return to work on a part-time basis provided the fraction you are requesting is no less than 0.6 FTE and the period of your request is no more than two years.

Academic staff: you are entitled to return to work on a part-time basis provided the fraction you are requesting is no less than 0.4 FTE and the period of your request is no more than two years taken in whole teaching periods.

You may also return to work within your period of paid leave and ‘bank’ the difference to use for a subsidised part-time return to work; or take a further period of paid leave at a slightly later date (prior to the child’s second birthday); or for professional development purposes and/or a research grant.

Refer to the University’s Parental Leave Policy for more information.
Returning to work

We recognise that returning to work after an extended period of parental or carer’s leave can be difficult in terms of managing work and family commitments. We encourage you to plan for your return, communicate with your manager about your needs, and be aware of the support available to you to ensure a smooth transition.

**CONNECT WITH YOUR MANAGER**

You may be returning from parental or carer’s leave on the date you originally agreed with your manager, or you may be returning at an earlier or later date than agreed. We understand that adapting to a new routine of working while being a parent or carer can be challenging. What works today may not work tomorrow or next week. So, keep talking with your manager and let them know what support you need.

If you’re on parental leave, you’re required to let the University know about your return date six weeks ahead of time. However, you’re encouraged to discuss this with your manager prior to this time so that your return to work meets your needs, as well as those of the team. If you have been absent from work for a period of time caring for a family member who is elderly or ill, or who has a disability, please contact your manager to discuss your return.

We encourage our managers to support parents or carers returning to the workforce as part of their role in fostering an inclusive culture, so be as open and transparent as you can to facilitate a smooth return to work. Consider the following prior to speaking with your manager:

- What your return-to-work could look like. You may require a graduated return to work, for example, part-time initially, building up to full-time, or you may want to return to the same role structure you had prior to your leave.
- What types of flexible working options will support you, for example, flexible start/finish times or working from home regularly or occasionally.
- What your career aspirations are. You may want new and challenging projects, or you may prefer to return to familiar work. There is no right or wrong answer, but it’s important that you let your manager know so your role can be structured to meet your needs and those of the team.
- What other supports you may need. For example; if you’re a woman with a baby, you may be breastfeeding and need access to breaks and on-campus facilities to either breastfeed or express.

**CAREER SUPPORT**

Thinking about your career while you’re looking after a newborn or a family member who needs care may not be your highest priority; however, Macquarie University supports you in combining a career with parenting or caring and we encourage you to discuss your career aspirations with your manager whenever you’re ready.

If you’re thinking about growing your skills and capabilities, and shaping the next step of your career, you can review training opportunities and support by searching for ‘development’ on the University staff website.

You may also wish to keep connected with industry associations through the professional memberships you hold, which you can keep current during your leave period.

If you’re an academic staff member, there are some specific programs designed to help you balance your work and caring responsibilities, including:

- **MQ Restart Grants**, which provide funding to Macquarie academics (appointed at any level) after parental leave of at least six months. Applications must be made within 12 months of your return to normal duties. The maximum amount that may be applied for is $20,000. Project costs can include requests for personnel, teaching relief, equipment, maintenance and travel. The funding allocation period is 12 months from the date of award. Search for ‘restart grants’ on the University staff website.

- **The MQ Primary Carer Conference Support Scheme**, which helps researchers with carer responsibilities to present at local or international conferences. Funding of up to $500 is available for a conference within the Sydney metropolitan area, $1000 for a conference outside the Sydney metropolitan area, and $2000 for an international conference. The scheme seeks to address the barriers that primary caring responsibilities can present for researchers presenting at conferences, particularly at early and mid-career stages. Search ‘primary carer conference support scheme’ on the University staff website.

You can also ask about any faculty-specific initiatives to support employees who have caring responsibilities.
FLEXIBLE WORKING AND LEAVE OPTIONS

Macquarie University is committed to creating a culture of inclusion. We offer a range of flexible working and leave options to suit the wide range of needs of our employees.

These include:

- Not working 9am – 5pm: Flexible working hours allow you to start and leave earlier or start and leave later.
- Not working in the office: Mobile working allows you to work from home or another location as required.
- Not working full-time: Depending on your role, part-time or job-sharing arrangements might be possible.

These arrangements may be either short or long term, depending on your circumstances.

If you are thinking about requesting a flexible work arrangement:

- Consider your situation and outcomes you want to achieve. Are there particular hours and days that would make a difference to your work-life balance? Would it work best for you to work in the office or away from the office some days? How long will you need these adjustments for?
- Make time to review the Flexible Work Policy and Procedure and the information on the University’s staff website. You’ll find details about flexible work options, how to make a request, and tips to set yourself up for success.
- Consider what arrangements could meet your needs and explore what might best fit your work area’s needs.
- Be prepared to sit down and discuss your situation and possible outcomes with your manager. It is good practice to let your manager know in advance that your needs are changing and you would like to request a flexible work arrangement. The questions on the next page will help you to prepare for an open conversation with your manager and explore solutions that suit both your needs and the University’s.

Macquarie also offers a range of leave options. Examples include:

- **Paid personal leave:** Staff receive an allocation of personal leave that may be used for personal sick leave and family/carer’s responsibilities (please see the University’s Personal Leave Policy for more information).
- **Annual leave:** Employees receive four weeks of annual leave a year, which can also be used for caring for others if paid personal leave entitlements are exhausted or not appropriate to the circumstance.
- **Purchased leave:** Eligible professional staff can purchase an extra five or 10 days of leave per year. Eligible academic staff can purchase an extra four weeks of leave per year.

For more information about leave options, refer to leave options or search for ‘leave’ on the University’s staff website. If you have questions or concerns, speak with your HR Client Team representative.
Flexible working conversation guide

The following discussion points can be used to help guide conversations with your manager.

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<tr>
<th>FOR CONSIDERATION</th>
<th>YOUR ANSWER...</th>
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<tr>
<td>How might flexible work arrangements benefit you?</td>
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<td>What flexible work arrangements do you think will best suit your needs?</td>
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<td>Why don’t you think other available options will work as well for you?</td>
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<td>How might flexible work arrangements impact your team? Consider the potential</td>
<td>positive and negative impacts</td>
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<td>positive and negative impacts</td>
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<tr>
<td>How might flexible work arrangements impact students or other key stakeholders?</td>
<td>Consider the potential positive and negative impacts</td>
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<td>How will you continue to meet the key requirements of your role while working</td>
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<td>flexibly?</td>
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<td>How will you stay connected with the office while working flexibly?</td>
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<td>What technology or other support might you require?</td>
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<td>How will you evaluate if flexible working arrangements are successful for you,</td>
<td>your team, your manager and students or other stakeholders?</td>
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<td>your team, your manager and students or other stakeholders?</td>
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<td>How will you ensure flexible work arrangements are set up for success from the</td>
<td>start? Instituting a trial period or scheduling regular check-ins might be</td>
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<td>beneficial</td>
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<td>What concerns do you have about the flexible work arrangements and what can you</td>
<td>both do to minimise them?</td>
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<td>What are your options if your manager declines your preferred flexible working</td>
<td>arrangement?</td>
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Supporting working parents

**CHILDCARE**

One of the greatest challenges for working parents is getting access to childcare. The sooner you register your child for a place, the better. There are three on-campus child care centres: Banksia, Gumnut and Mia Mia, which are also approved for the Australian Government Child Care Subsidy. Like everywhere, places are limited, but priority is given to Macquarie University staff and students. Find out more:

- Search for ‘children’s services’ on the University staff website for more information about the childcare centres on campus as well as the range of school holiday programs on offer.
- Search the Australian Government database of childcare centres and find out about getting assistance with costs at mychild.gov.au
- For information on local childcare options in the City of Ryde visit ryde.nsw.gov.au/Community/Children-and-Families/Childcare-Services
- Search for National Child Care Subsidy on the Department of Human Services website to find out about support for the cost of childcare.

**BREASTFEEDING AT WORK**

Macquarie University is an accredited breastfeeding-friendly workplace. If required, you can access paid breaks for expressing breast milk and for breastfeeding. This can be a sensitive topic to discuss with your manager, so if you’re more comfortable communicating this in writing, email your manager to let them know what you need, including:

- how many breaks you anticipate you’ll need during the day
- when you expect to take them.
- if you need additional support, you can contact the Australian Breastfeeding Association at breastfeeding.asn.au or on 1800 686 268. Trained breastfeeding counsellors are available to assist with questions about how to combine breastfeeding with returning to work.

There are a number of parenting rooms on campus which offer facilities such as change tables, bar fridges for storing milk, and running water. Their locations are:

- 14 Eastern Rd, Ground floor, room 107 (previously E8A)
- 29 Wally’s Walk, Level 1, room 109 (previously X5B)
- Macquarie Library, Level 4 (please contact Library staff on level 4 for access to this room)
- Sport and Aquatic Centre, Gymnasium Road (for members)
- Facilities are also available for parents of children enrolled in child care centres on campus:
  - Banksia Cottage, 8 Link Rd
  - Mia Mia, 29 Wally’s Walk
  - Gumnut Cottage, 17 University Ave

For locations, look under ‘services’ on the interactive Campus Map on the University’s staff website.
# Returning to work checklist

Here is a list of things to think about, action or discuss as you plan for a smooth return to work.

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<tr>
<th>RETURNING FROM LEAVE – THINGS TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR MANAGER</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your planned return dates</td>
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<td>Defining your role and key projects you’ll be working on</td>
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<td>How your return to work could look, eg full-time, part-time or a staged return</td>
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<td>Flexible working options you might want to request, eg working from home regularly or occasionally, flexible start/finish times</td>
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<tr>
<td>Any other support you anticipate needing for your return, eg breastfeeding</td>
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<td>Setting a timeframe to discuss your career goals</td>
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<td>Creating a smooth handover if someone else was in your role while you were on leave</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explore support and funding opportunities, eg Restart Grants, Primary Carer Conference Support Scheme – check the University’s Carer’s Hub website for details</td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting a timeframe to discuss your career goals</td>
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<td>Agree to check-ins – frequent initially, then on a regular basis</td>
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<td>Any changes that may have occurred in your team/unit while you were on leave</td>
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<td>Confirm your childcare, disability care or elder care arrangements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Let people know that you’re back, what your return will look like and what projects you’ll be working on</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensure your professional memberships continue now you’re back</td>
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<tr>
<td>Update your voicemail, and if you’re working flexibly, include a message in your email signature regarding your work days/hours and how you/the team can be contacted when you’re not in the office</td>
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Available support

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY SUPPORT OPTIONS
A range of support services are available to employees.

- The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a free 24/7 confidential counselling, coaching and wellbeing service, which is available to employees and their immediate family members. It provides support around how to best achieve lifestyle, work, personal and family goals, and gives assistance with managing work and life experiences, issues or concerns. Search for 'EAP' on the University’s staff website.

- Macquarie has partnered with Medibank Private to offer employees corporate health cover, including an ongoing 9 per cent discount on the cost of private health insurance. Search for 'Medibank Private' on the University’s staff website.

- A range of medical services are available on or near campus, including a general practitioner clinic. Search for 'hospitals and clinics' on the University’s staff website.

- Employees can keep active at the Sport and Aquatic Centre. Search for 'sport and aquatic centre' on the University’s staff website.

- Macquarie University has three child-care centres on campus and offers a range of vacation care programs. Search for 'children's services' on the University’s staff website.

OTHER SUPPORT OPTIONS
A range of support services are available to employees.

For parents

- Department of Human Services: humanservices.gov.au/individuals/families
- Australia’s online child care portal: mychild.gov.au
- Department of Health Pregnancy, Birth and Baby website: pregnancybirthbaby.org.au/partners/department-of-health
- Families NSW: families.nsw.gov.au

For carers

- Department of Human Services: humanservices.gov.au/individuals/carers
- Carers NSW: carersnsw.org.au
- Carers Australia: carersaustralia.com.au

USEFUL CONTACTS
If you need additional information or support, contact your HR Client Team representative.

If you have any questions about diversity and inclusion, contact a member of the Workplace Diversity and Inclusion team at workplacediversityinclusion@mq.edu.au