

Maternity Leave Toolkit

and Case Studies

This toolkit is for female staff and their managers to use when discussing and planning maternity leave arrangements



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Caution: The most up-to-date version of this Toolkit is available at www.federation.edu.au/worklife

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Welcome

Maternity leave is a process to be worked through jointly by the manager and the staff member so that good, workable outcomes can be arranged for both parties.

Pregnancy signals a time of great change for both the woman and the work environment. If it is managed well, staff feel and remain valued members of the team.



This toolkit

This toolkit provides a range of suggestions, dealing with:

- A. Initial steps: Where do I start?
- B. Working while pregnant: What are the options?
- C. Planning, deciding and formalising maternity leave arrangements
- D. Keeping in touch with work: getting the balance right
- E. Planning for return to work
- F. Plans and other issues
- G. She's back!

Working through these sections of the toolkit can provide a step-by-step guide to plan, decide and formalise maternity leave for both managers and staff.



Suggestion for use of this toolkit

Managers and staff could each print a copy of this toolkit, or relevant pages, and use it together as a series of guided conversations when planning maternity leave.

Managers could then keep it in staff files as a record of negotiations with particular staff members.

A copy could be given to the staff member each time you meet so that you are both clear about your previous discussions.

E. Planning for return to work

Women taking maternity leave initially make decisions about their return to work arrangements before the baby has arrived. It is possible that, as the time for return draws near, some conditions need to be re-negotiated, or that the woman is ready to return earlier (or later) than anticipated. It is also possible that the woman may need to ease back into her job in the early stages, and will be looking for some extra support. On the other hand, perhaps she wishes to extend her period of leave.

FedUni can support staff with family friendly practices such as leave without pay, reduction of time fraction for an agreed period, 48/52, flexible work practices, home-based work, allowing staff to negotiate lactation breaks, providing a private, clean room for breastfeeding, if possible with access to a fridge and a sink.

For consideration

To assist with making plans go smoothly, it is useful to start discussions as early as possible, and keep reviewing these plans as time progresses. It is a good idea to re-visit the Leave and Work Life Balance website at www.federation.edu.au/worklife

If the staff member is considering wanting to return on a reduced time fraction, now is the time to explore a range of options and case studies in the University's *Job Split, Job Share, Job Support Toolkit* on the Leave and Work Life Balance website.

Staff member

1. There may be situations where you want to return to work earlier than planned, perhaps because of money, a re-structure, or just because you are ready. There may be legislation or other rules that can affect your request for an early return. You and your manager should seek advice from Human Resources before making any arrangements.
2. Make contact with your manager to talk about your return to work arrangements.
3. What will you do if you are asked to consider returning early for a particular reason, such as a new initiative or a re-structure? What flexibility issues might you need to discuss?
4. Do you want changed work hours or more flexibility on your return to work? What is realistic in your work area? What will work best for you? Read *Elizabeth's* and *Andrew's* case studies.
5. Will you be still breastfeeding when you return to work? Will you need flexibility to have lactation breaks for breastfeeding and/or expressing milk?
6. Do you want to apply for a further period of leave, without pay?
7. If you want to explore return to work options (such as extension of leave or reduced time fraction) contact Human Resources.

Manager

1. If your staff member wants to return early, what are the implications for you? How could you work through these?
2. Would you consider asking a staff member to return from leave early if there was a workload need? What flexibility could you offer to make this possible? Read *Anne's* case study for some ideas.
3. Make contact in advance of the staff member's proposed date of return to work. Ask when would be a good time to discuss return to work arrangements.
4. If you would like assistance in accommodating requests for changed, reduced, or more flexible work hours for your staff member's return to work, contact Human Resources. Read *Andrew's* case study.
5. Ask your staff member if she needs flexibility for breastfeeding and/or expressing milk breaks when she returns to work. Is there a private room with a lock and access to a fridge somewhere on the campus? What can you make available? See *Paula's* case study for ideas.

Remember that these are usually temporary arrangements while the staff member has a young baby. The best solutions are those that work for staff, managers and the work areas. Read *Anne's*, *Andrew's* and *Elizabeth's* case studies to understand how negotiations can work both ways.

For more detail on exploring options for reduced or flexible hours, see FedUni's *Flexible Work Arrangements Toolkit* and FedUni's *Job Split, Job Share, Job Support Toolkit* at www.federation.edu.au/worklife

Case Studies

Maternity Leave



Note: These case studies reflect real FedUni stories and experiences, but names and job titles have been changed.



Planning maternity leave

Julia, Teacher

I will be taking six months maternity leave this year. I have been teaching in the Higher Education sector for seven years and am currently on a full-time, 2-year contract. I plan to take six months maternity leave on half pay.

I am due to start my leave three weeks before the end of Semester 1, but have negotiated a mutually agreeable solution with my manager, Rob, and with my students. The last few weeks of term when I am on leave will be workshop time for my students to complete assessment tasks. I will collect and assess their work early in Semester 2 after my baby is born. I could do some work while on leave as I was on half pay and we organised this in advance with Human Resources. Rob will organise for the results to be recorded later than usual and my students understand the reason why. They prefer to have me, rather than an unfamiliar teacher, assessing their work.

I am scheduled to return to work three weeks before the Christmas break, but have negotiated with my manager to take a combination of working from home and recreation leave before returning full-time for the start of the next teaching year.

I have considered talking to my manager about working from home for half a day per week during next year while my baby is little, but I'll negotiate this with Rob if the time and the need arise.



Being flexible: manager and staff

Anne, Administrative Assistant

I had a full-time HEW position before I took my maternity leave. My manager, Lynne, asked me to return earlier than my scheduled date because she was establishing a new role and didn't have an administrative assistant. Lynne was prepared to accept whatever hours I could manage, so I started with half a day and progressively moved up to full-time once more. In the early stages of my return Lynne was able to access back up support from within the office. This meant I could find my feet and work out a routine for my family bit by bit.

I was still having some medical treatment when I returned but was given the flexibility to take appointments when I could get them. A re-structure in the school meant that I had a new manager, Paul, but he was great to work with as well.

I still have the flexibility to leave 10 minutes early to collect my daughter from childcare. To compensate, I start 10 minutes early in the mornings.

It's all about flexibility and being able to negotiate what works well for you and your manager. The flexibility I had from both my managers made the transition back into work easy for me. It was great.

Managing contract expiry date

Ranisha, Project Worker

First time

When I planned my first lot of maternity leave there was no information available on the Human Resources web page. It's good to see some information there now.

I had been working at the University in a full-time contract position for nearly three years when I became pregnant. I wanted to take 12 months maternity leave but my contract was due to expire during this time. I knew that I could only apply for maternity leave that fell within the time frame of my current contract. If I was offered another contract and accepted it, I thought that I could then apply for the balance of my leave from this new contract, but was uncertain about this in the early stages of planning. This is what did happen in the end, and so it simply meant that I started my new contract with a period of maternity leave.

Once again...

Recently I became pregnant for the second time. I will apply for 12 months maternity leave, though once again I am in the situation where my contract will expire during my maternity leave period. I am hopeful that I will be issued with another contract so that I can once again apply for the balance of my leave. I hope to return to work part-time when my second lot of maternity leave is over.

Manager perspective

Andrew, Director, Higher Education Research Centre

Our research team has had several staff return to work after maternity leave and has actively worked with individual staff members to ensure that the return is as easy as possible for all parties. Recently a staff member employed at a 0.8 time fraction requested to return at 0.3. After assessing potential impact, roles etc. we arranged for her to return to work at 0.3 time fraction.

We also developed a changed role that incorporated support work at an appropriate level. This particular staff member's greatest strength was in her knowledge of research project management and her ability to effectively assist staff and students in developing, resourcing and coordinating research projects, and we wanted this to be the main aspect of her role.

The time fraction was split into two mornings and one additional half day that was flexible. This enabled her to make babysitting arrangements that resulted in less anxiety – for her in returning to work and for us in terms of her ability to focus on her work and contribute productively and positively to the team. The benefits for everyone involved were tangible.

I think that there are also some less obvious benefits to return to work arrangements such as this one. They make a statement to other staff about the value that we place on the individual and promote and encourage a positive view of flexible work practices.



Lactation facilities

Paula, Administrative Officer

I had only just achieved full-time employment at the Uni (after 6 months absence) and I was 6.5 months pregnant. My supervisor asked me how much leave I would like and I told them that I would need three months after the baby was born before I could come back. It was agreed to.

This is not unusual I guess, but upon my return, a room was set aside for me (only I had the key) so that I could express milk in private. I believe this would help a lot of new mothers with the transition from home to work and help them feel at ease during the feeding transition. I was also offered the opportunity to take time out when needed to feed my daughter had she been at the crèche. I was fortunate enough to have a stay at home husband so I didn't use this option.

I think that options like this really assist in helping staff more readily return to work.

Flexible solutions: before and after

Sally, School Liaison Officer

I had been working full-time at the University for almost three years when I became pregnant. I told my manager about my maternity leave plans quite early to allow time for planning within the work group.

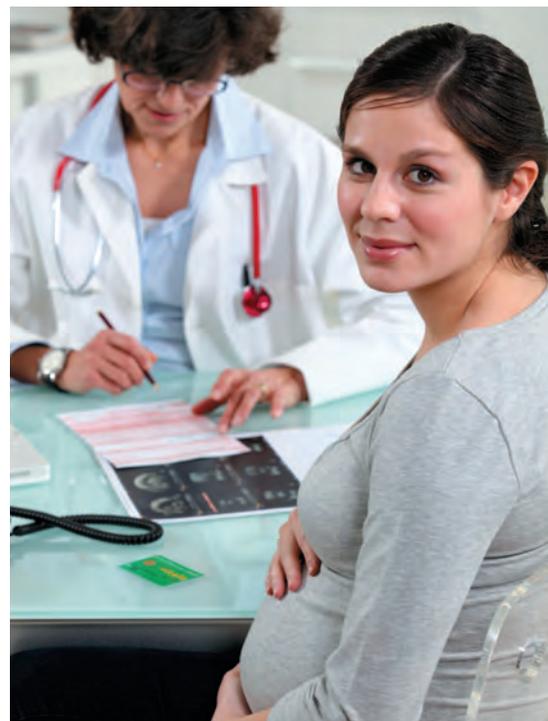
My job entails travelling and visiting secondary schools from time-to-time and I continued to do this even during my pregnancy as I had good support from my manager and team leader. Denise, my manager told me that I was not to lift heavy boxes of promotional materials and asked my team leader, Peter, to arrange for the packing of the car to be done for me when I was attending an event. This was an enormous help while I was pregnant and I am very appreciative of what was done for me.

I left work on the day my doctor specified and, with advice from Human Resources, was able to take four weeks recreational leave before starting my maternity leave. Originally I asked for six months maternity leave and then took the option of extending it another six months.

As my leave was nearly finished I negotiated with Denise to return part-time for the first six months to do a specific project. During this time I had some flexibility to work from home on some parts of the project.

I'm now working full-time once more and continuing with this project as part of my time fraction. Two days per week I have the flexibility to leave 30 minutes early to collect my child from childcare. On those days I take only a 30-minute lunchbreak to compensate for the early finishes.

Occasionally, if my child is sick I am able to take carer leave or work from home at these times. I appreciate this flexibility and take care to make up any extra time along the way.



Win-win solutions

Elizabeth, Student Learning Skills Officer

I had a 0.5 position for three years prior to taking 12 months maternity leave. My manager was prepared to be flexible with my employment arrangements when I returned to work and the two of us negotiated what would be manageable for all parties.

Some of the negotiated flexibility included:

- No appointments with students at lunchtimes while I was breastfeeding. This enabled me to go to the crèche to breastfeed my daughter.
- Starting ½ hour later in the morning so that I could take my child to crèche, and working ½ hour later in the afternoon when my husband was able to do the crèche pick-up.
- Working extra hours over the year at no extra pay so that I could take extra time at home during the weeks when the crèche was closed.

I always made up any time that I missed in starting later or taking a longer lunch break to take my child to kindergarten. My time fraction has now increased and I am willing to be flexible about seeing students at busy times as needed, even though it is not my core work role now.

I am fortunate that my job allowed such flexibility and am very grateful to my manager, Vicki, for negotiating win-win solutions for both of us.



Specialised teaching role

Hannah, Academic Staff

My job involves laboratory work and once I became pregnant it was important for me to find out if the chemicals I used at work were safe for pregnant women. Other than that, I didn't need to make any other changes to my work while I was pregnant. In fact, I was very fit and worked until I was 37 weeks.

I began my six months maternity leave just as a new academic year was starting, though I spent the two months prior to this getting things ready for someone else to step into the specialised role and take over my teaching load. Because of the specialised nature of my work I made myself available for contact while I was on leave, in case staff needed to contact me for anything. I did get a few calls and didn't mind being available like this.

I had been working full-time at the University for almost five years before I had my baby, but I arranged with my manager and Head of School to come back part-time initially. I was able to start at a 0.7 time fraction that involved 2½ days on campus and one day working at home. I had the flexibility to negotiate which days of the week were best for me to spend on campus, and was able to tie them in with childcare. Before my baby was even born, I spoke to the crèche to see if any days were less busy, so I had a bit of an idea about what part of the week I would come into work.

My maternity leave and return to work both went very smoothly and I appreciate the flexibility I had in making my arrangements. I put some effort into finding out all about maternity leave and I think this helped too.





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