

Extended Leave Toolkit:

Preparation, Keeping in Touch & Returning to Work

Who should use the Extended Leave Toolkit

This toolkit should be used by staff and managers of staff who will be taking a period of leave which is greater than 2 months. This could include parental leave, recreation leave, long service leave, sick leave or leave without salary.

Preparation

Staff and Managers should familiarise themselves with the relevant Enterprise Agreement to confirm leave and flexibility eligibility, entitlements and application and approval processes.

- [Griffith University General Staff Enterprise Agreement 2017-2021](#)
- [Griffith University Academic Staff Enterprise Agreement 2017-2021](#)

[People Support staff in People and Wellbeing](#) will also be able to answer queries that staff or managers may have about leave.

Applying for leave

Short term leave

Most types of short term leave can be applied for via

Staff Portal > My Staff Page > Time and Absence > Request absence

Long term leave

Staff should provide as much notice as possible when preparing to take long term leave, and where applicable, consider how this will best fit the needs and schedule of the work area.

The **Leave Application Form** should be completed for the following:

- Parental Leave
- Leave without salary more than 2 months
- Sick leave without salary more than 2 months.

You can download the leave application form [here](#)

Discussion

The staff member and supervisor should make a time to discuss how the job will be managed while the employee is on leave. Discussion and negotiation might include:

- ☐ Confirming leave and anticipated return to work dates
- ☐ Preliminary thoughts on return to work arrangements – full time, part time, what fraction?
- ☐ If the staff member is considering applying for promotion, what mentoring and guidance will they require while on leave to complete this application? Staff should be made aware of promotions information sessions.
- ☐ Is the staff member still able to complete their role/tasks in the lead up to their leave? This may be particularly relevant if leave type is to be parental leave or sick leave.
- ☐ Plan a schedule of work/tasks to complete prior to leave
- ☐ How will work tasks be covered while away?
- ☐ How much time will be needed for a handover of the role or individual tasks?
- ☐ Highlight if the leave will occur over a critical or peak time
 - Discuss strategies for how this might be best managed
- ☐ For academic staff – discuss communication of your leave arrangements with your students also
- ☐ Preferred methods for staying in touch while on leave – how you'd like to keep in touch and with what type of information

Staying in touch

Keeping in touch is considered best practice and in the interests of both the employer and employee and as such, the University expects that there will be an appropriate level of two-way communication while the staff member is absent on any form of long term leave.

Prior to leave, the staff member and their manager should agree on a strategy to keep in touch for the period that the staff member will be away from the workplace.

Especially in the case of parental leave absences, the University expects that staff members will be informed of changes that occur in the workplace – particularly those that affect the absent staff member.

There is also an expectation that the staff member will notify the University, through their supervisor, of any changes in circumstance, for example:

- a change to, or confirmation of return date
- a change to, or confirmation of intended fraction (how many hours per week)
- a change to, or confirmation of intended work pattern (which days the staff member will be at work).

Ways to stay in touch

Emails

The University's email system enables most staff to log on at home to keep track of relevant emails – these may be all staff announcements from the University Executive, or office announcements about staff movements, changes in processes or invitations to office events etc.

If the staff member does not wish to check their work emails while off campus, it may be appropriate to agree that key messages be forwarded on to their **personal email** by the supervisor or a colleague.

Catch ups

Staff may also wish to keep in touch on issues and changes at work by nominating regular catch-ups with a colleague or supervisor – this might be via regular phone calls, emails or catching up over a coffee.

Social events and visits

The staff member may wish to visit the office, or attend office social events such as end of year party or other office celebrations.

Keeping in Touch work days for staff on parental leave

Employees on a period of parental leave have the option, with the University's agreement, to keep in touch with the workplace by means of paid Keeping in Touch work days. The purpose of Keeping in Touch days is to allow an employee to remain connected with their workplace and help them transition back into work by accessing up to 10 paid work days while on unpaid parental leave from the University, without losing their entitlement to Paid Parental Leave payments from the Government.

Keeping in Touch days can support staff to refresh their skills, transition back into the workplace, become familiar with new or updated processes and be involved in forward planning discussions or meetings that may affect their role. These days can therefore be used to participate in a planning meeting, participate in training, or perform work to become familiar with the workplace or their role before returning to work.

Further information on the Parental Leave Keep in Touch provision can be found on the [Department of Human Services](#) and [Fair Work Ombudsman](#) websites. Again, please seek guidance from [People Support](#) if you have any queries.

Suggested checklist for staying in touch

- ☐ To what degree does the staff member wish to keep in touch while on leave?
 - ☐ They wish to be in full communication (please specify: _____)
 - ☐ They are happy to receive updates/information only
 - ☐ They would prefer to minimise communication until their return to work but understand that both Griffith and the employee have certain communication requirements.
- ☐ Will the staff member be eligible to access formal keeping in touch work days and do they agree to do so (an employer cannot require an employee to engage in work whilst on leave)
 - ☐ If yes, make a plan of how this might work, types of activities the staff member may be involved in and how they will undertake this.

How will you stay in touch?

- ☐ Emails
- ☐ Office visits
- ☐ Checking Griffith email
- ☐ Checking personal email for forwarded/new messages
- ☐ Regular catch ups with supervisor or colleague/s
- ☐ Other _____

What will you stay in touch about?

- ☐ Changes to staffing within the element/office/your team
- ☐ Opportunities for professional development
- ☐ Opportunities for promotion and /or job vacancies within the Element
- ☐ Changes to policies or processes that will impact on the staff member and/or their role
- ☐ Relevant all-staff announcements from the Vice Chancellor or other members of Executive Group
- ☐ Progress or milestone updates on particular projects or programs that the staff member is normally responsible for:
Details: _____
- ☐ Invitations to element/office/group social events (morning teas, celebrations, end of year party)
- ☐ Planning sessions, training and development opportunities (including workshops, conferences, secondment or continuing recruitment opportunities)
- ☐ Return to work arrangements such as date, fraction and pattern
- ☐ Other _____

How often will you stay in touch?

- ☐ Ad hoc (as relevant emails come through for example)
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ Every 2 to 3 months
- ☐ Other: _____

Returning to Work

At the end of a leave period, the staff member will wherever possible return to the same position as that prior to leave. If circumstances prevent this, the staff member will be placed in a position of equal status and conditions, taking into account the staff member's qualifications, skills and experience.

Changes in circumstances

Should the staff member wish to **return to work earlier** than advised, the staff member will need to submit a written request to their Supervisor. Approval will be at the discretion of the Head of Element and will be dependent upon organisational arrangements.

An employee may **extend the period of parental leave** if: a) the employee provides at least 14 days written notice to the University before the original expiry date of the leave; and b) the total period of parental leave taken is not more than the maximum of 52 weeks.

In the event that the staff member decides not to return to work at the end of the leave period, the staff member must confirm this in writing to the Head of Element through the Supervisor, giving the appropriate notice period, as soon as practicable.

Any variation to an agreed and approved Reversible Part Time Appointment for the Care of Dependents should be negotiated with the Head of Element, taking into account the needs of both the staff member and the University.

Preparing to return to work

Work arrangements

Prior to returning to work, the staff member and supervisor should discuss how the workplace can best accommodate any new circumstances of the employee, while still meeting the needs of the University. Considerations may include:

- a formal return to work plan (in the case of sick leave for illness or injury)
- any physical/resource requirements (for example, access to [breastfeeding/expressing/parenting facilities](#))
- flexible work arrangements.

Workplace Flexibility

At Griffith we proudly have a range of informal and formal workplace flexibility options available for all genders. These include (but are not limited to) schemes such as the *Flexible Work Year* and *Reversible part time appointment for the care of dependents*. Professional staff may have access to variable hours arrangements and flexi-time, for example.

We recognise that workplace flexibility may be required for a range of reasons (for example, carer responsibilities, disability, work/life balance) and is key to attracting, retaining and advancing talented staff. Helpful resources on workplace flexibility can be found at the

- [Workplace flexibility site](#) which outlines the different types of formal leave and flexibility, and provides links to further details in our [Enterprise Agreements](#).
- [Requests for flexible working arrangements Fair Work Ombudsman website](#)
- [Employee Flexibility Toolkit \(WGEA\)](#).

Other arrangements – staff member's considerations

In addition to your work, there are a number of other considerations applicable to the staff member prior to their return, these might include:

- arranging a [parking permit](#)
- confirming salary deductions with payroll (e.g. Griffith childcare, parking, gym membership)
- conducting a trial run of getting to and from work, with the addition of any new arrangements/restrictions.

Other arrangements – manager's considerations

Managers' considerations include

- confirm network and building access is in place for the staff member
- if the staff member was removed from email distribution lists for any reason, have them re-added
- notify the work team that the staff member is returning and discuss the impacts with them, this might include:
 - where the staff member will be seated
 - how tasks will be redistributed within the team
 - any changes to staffing to accommodate the staff member's return
 - will any secondment/development opportunities come to an end?
 - will any temporary contracts come to an end?
 - how to work through changes in team dynamics
- arrange a team meeting/morning tea/coffee catch up to welcome the staff member back to the workplace
- For support through this process, please contact [People Support](#).

Checklist – Preparing to return to work¹

- ☐ Confirm return date: _____
- ☐ Confirm fraction and work pattern that the staff member will return to
 - Details: _____
- ☐ Confirm which role/position the staff member will return to – their substantive or another suitable position
 - Position title: _____
 - Manager: _____
- ☐ Discuss job share or task sharing arrangements that may take place
 - Details: _____
- ☐ Discuss handover details – who, which tasks, timeframe

Task/s	Contact	Timeframe

- ☐ Highlight priority targets or activities that the staff member will contribute to/manage on their return.
Details: _____
- ☐ Make a time for the staff member to meet with the manager on their first day back at work
 - Details: _____
- ☐ Discuss if a re-induction is required for the staff member on general issues or practices within the work area or wider University.
 - Yes / No
 - Details: _____
- ☐ Discuss changes to team staffing and/or reporting lines and impact this will have on the staff member.
 - Details: _____

¹ For people with disabilities/injury management requirements, please consult with [injury management staff in People and Wellbeing](#) regarding accommodations, graduated return to work etc.

Parental leave case studies

Parental leave is available to staff across the University, all genders, academic and general staff and staff at all levels. Here, you can read the stories of colleagues who have accessed parental leave, how they kept in touch with the University while on leave and their transitions back to work. Our thanks go to these colleagues for sharing their stories.

Flexibility and fatherhood

Alan, Associate Professor | Griffith Sciences

Alan took around 5 months parental leave in 2013. His wife had experienced birth related complications and therefore Alan was required to care for both his wife and their newborn baby.

Alan was fully supported by the University and approval was granted for leave, however the School was then unable to secure a relief staff member to take on Alan's teaching duties.

Alan, who is based on the Gold Coast campus, took up to the balancing act, and agreed with the school to 80% leave over the period, teaching one day per week at Nathan campus.

As an academic, Alan also continued his research and HDR student supervision while on leave, however was able to successfully fulfil these duties from home rather than needing to be on campus. This flexibility meant he could still be present at home to care for his wife and child when they needed him most.



A worker and a mum

Kirsty, International Student Advisor | Griffith International

"I found Griffith's parental leave scheme to be highly valuable to my family. To be guaranteed that my position would still be waiting for me when I returned from leave helped a lot during the tough days at home, where your sense of self and purpose can take quite a beating.

Always in the back of my mind, I still considered myself to be a 'worker' as well as a mother and that helped me from getting too lost and overwhelmed during the long days and night of nappies and no sleep. There was always a chance to get back to my 'real world' later. To be paid for 6 months was also a huge contributor to my sense of worth also, I wasn't just someone who was in the house and cleaning/ cooking/ providing love, I was also actively contributing to the finances. This allowed me to stay at home with my child for the full year after her birth, and that was extremely valuable for us all as a family unit.

I maintained contact with my colleagues/ friends and stayed abreast of what was happening at work, and it was LOVELY to come back to work welcomed with a morning tea (where I could drink the FULL cup of coffee in ONE sitting).

I cannot express enough gratitude to this fantastic opportunity that is given to the women/ parents in our workplace."



Planning, caring and collegiality

Alejandro, Professor | Griffith Sciences

Alejandro will take 12 weeks parental leave to care for his young son when his wife returns to the workforce following her own period of parental leave. This leave has been planned well in advance and Alejandro is looking forward to spending this time with his boy.

Alejandro received very positive support from his Head of School and Discipline Head who had not previously been met with the challenge of coordinating a period of parental leave for an academic staff member in the school. While this led to some confusion, their support was unwavering, and with the assistance of People and Wellbeing, the school is now well prepared for Alejandro's absence.

Alejandro will take full leave from his on-campus, undergraduate teaching commitments, allowing him the flexibility needed to care for his young son. While on leave, he will continue his research supervision, but is appreciative that this will be achieved with lower intensity and at times that are convenient to his caring responsibilities also.

Alejandro will also keep in touch with his team, particularly those staff replacing him to assist them and ensure things are still running smoothly on his return.

Alejandro noted that having experienced the support that has been given to him to enable this time with his son means that he will now be prepared to step up and take on additional duties to enable his colleagues the same opportunity in the future.



Support and flexibility the key

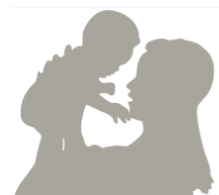
Ashlea, Research Fellow | Centre for Work, Organisation & Wellbeing

Like many Research Fellows, Ashlea has been employed on fixed term contracts since commencing at Griffith in 2013. Because of this, Ashlea thought that she would not be eligible for parental leave so was pleasantly surprised when informed by People and Wellbeing that she was entitled to access it.

While she was on leave, Ashlea continued her work on revising papers, especially those for which she was sole author as she didn't want her research and publication progress to stall. Ashlea was also able to use this opportunity to keep in touch with her colleagues.

Recognising the work that was being completed, Ashlea was given great support by her supervisor and they arranged for her to return to work slightly early, but for less days per week than was originally planned (2 rather than 3). Her supervisor has been very supportive throughout the entire process and continues to give Ashlea flexibility in her days on campus, to ensure this fits around family responsibilities also.

Ashlea remarks that the work done by the University (through People and Wellbeing and her supervisor) to identify that she was eligible to take parental leave was a great incentive to keep in touch and return to work.



A pretty standard story...

Angela, Stores/Resources Officer | Health Technical Services

Working in a hands-on environment, Angela was well supported as her pregnancy progressed, with her colleagues offering support and assistance with more physical tasks on a daily basis. Angela also made use of a special parking permit, enabling her to park closer to the office in the later stages of her pregnancy.



Angela worked up to her ideal date and then took 11 months leave, returning to work after her son started day care at 10 months of age. While on leave, Angela kept in touch with colleagues socially and at events such as the Christmas party.

A new Team Leader commenced while Angela was on leave and made contact with just prior to her return to work to talk through the details such as confirming Angela's return date, her hours and a bit about changes in the team and processes.

Angela has felt well supported throughout her parental leave and return to work and is now looking to the future and thinking about plans for when her son commences school in a couple of years.