

MATERNITY AND PARENTAL LEAVE MANAGEMENT

Maternity and Parental Leave Support Policy at the University of Pardubice

1. Background

High-standard, motivated and supported employees, proud of their affiliation with the University of Pardubice, are a basic prerequisite for fulfilling the vision and mission of the University, achieving excellence on a national and international scale and for further high-standard and sustainable development of the University, which values their work and appreciates their contribution to the common goals¹.

Human resources management is one of the five priorities for enhancing the quality and promoting sustainable development at the University of Pardubice (hereinafter the “University”). This priority involves modern HR approaches, improving the work environment, providing suitable work conditions and services for all employees as well as systematic support of employees in their career development and full use of their expertise. These steps not only aim to enhance the professional and personal satisfaction of employees, but also support further development of the University, being an important educational and research institution.

The University stresses the need to support parent employees during maternity² and parental³ leave (hereinafter the “leave”). The ultimate objective is to develop a system of institutional support that will enable parents who take care of children to take part in the activities at the University and continue their professional activities and further develop their knowledge and skills. This not only enhances the employee loyalty towards the University, but also motivates the employees to continue their professional career and resume their professional activities.

This Policy is based on the 2021-2030 Gender Equality Strategy of the Government of the Czech Republic, University 2021+ Strategic Plan and other relevant documents including HRS4T Action Plan and the University Gender Equality Strategy. These strategies are in line with the EU international standards endorsed by the University, and promote employment policy aiming at work-life balance and consistent employee career development.⁴

2. Policy Objectives

Stereotypes and attitudes favouring the career development and salaries of male employees still prevail in the Czech labour market. Female employees are considered to have the primary responsibility for taking care of children and other family members, and often face difficulties when returning to work as

¹ 2021+ University of Pardubice Strategic Plan

² Maternity leave is taken in relation to a birth of a child and lasts 28 weeks (37 weeks in cases of multiple births). Pregnant women usually start maternity leave 6-8 weeks before the birth; the leave must not end earlier than 6 weeks after the birth.

³ Mothers are entitled to parental leave after their maternity leave end, whereas fathers are entitled to parental leave from the moment of the birth of the child; parents may choose the duration of the parental leave provided that it does not extend over the third birthday of the child. Adoptive and foster parents may also take parental leave.

⁴ Some of the measures introduced herein may reasonably apply to doctoral students. Even though doctoral students are not University employees, the University wishes to have them resume and complete the studies if they take the leave before completing the studies. Accordingly, supervisors of doctoral students are advised to use measures introduced in Part 3 hereof to minimize the number of students who fail to complete their studies because of starting a family.

well as in terms of their professional and career development. Parental leaves are often perceived as an interruption of career development involving loss of knowledge, competences and expertise.

However, active steps taken by employers may mitigate the situation and be mutually beneficial. If employee work-life balance is promoted, employee loyalty is enhanced and their professional growth supported, including more effective time management⁵

In light of this vision, the University has set the following goals:

1. **System of procedures** related to taking the leave and returning to work as well as procedures to be employed by managerial employees in such situations.
2. **Maintaining communication** with employees taking the leave to keep them informed of the activities at the University and their department or office.
3. **Facilitating reasonable employee involvement** during the leave under agreements to perform work or complete a job, as far as legally practicable,⁶ to prevent the professional career from being interrupted.
4. **Developing abilities and skills of employees** during the leave in line with their needs and possibilities of the employer.
5. **Having access** to some of the University facilities and services even during the leave including, without limitation, information systems, library, or buildings.
6. **Enhancing services** for parent employees, either taking the leave or not, having children younger than 15 years of age
7. **Raising awareness** among employees taking the leave and taking care of children below the age of 15 about activities and services available to them.

This Policy is in line with the University commitment to promote equal opportunities, employee career potential development and work-life balance.

3. Systematic processes and tools design to enhance leave management and promote maternity and paternity as well as work-life reconciliation

Taking leave as well as returning back to work is addressed in some of the University strategic documents including [University Equal Opportunities Strategy](#) and [Action Plan](#). The following sections introduce the new processes and tools to enhance leave management, work-life reconciliation and building “pro-family” environment at the University.

3.1. Maternity and Parental Leave Handbook for Parents

The handbook provides parents with basic information about the legal framework as well as specific recommendations on the steps to take before the maternity leave and the following paternity leave. The handbook also provides guidance on maintaining contact with the University and preparing to return to work. Parent Handbook (Annex No. 1) includes information on applicable legislation as well as specific University procedures. The handbook is available on the [Intranet](#) and University [website](#) and will be updated on a regular basis.

⁵ INSTITUTIONAL MATERNITY AND PARENTAL LEAVE MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES of APERIO as part of the project entitled Corporate parental leave management – New start. (www.aperio.cz).

⁶ For example, Section 34b(2) of the existing Labour Code stipulates that employees may not perform the activities covered by the employment contract with the employer under agreements to perform work or complete a job. In addition, women may not be employed during the first six weeks after the birth. Section 16 of the Sickness Insurance Act stipulates that there is no entitlement to maternity and paternal pay as long as the employee works for the employer.

3.2. Interviews with employees taking leave

The University will support systematic communication with parents before and during the leave. To keep them informed about what is going on at the University and help them return back to work and easily re-integrate, it is necessary not to lose contact. Supervisors of such employees as well as the Human Resources (hereinafter “HR”) will be involved in such communication with parent employees.

The key interview will take place before taking the leave and will be conducted by the respective supervisors and may be attended by an HR officer. During the interview, prospective parents will be informed about the Parent Handbook (Annex No. 1) as well as the steps to be taken when taking the leave and when returning.

The interview will address the parents’ plans in terms of length of the leave, maintaining contact with the University and, if applicable, participation in the activities during the leave and plans to return to work. The interview will also include assessment of the employee’s work so far, discussion of future cooperation and an invitation to be in active contact with the employee’s department or office and the University.

To make the quality of interviews consistent and support managerial employees, Handbook for Managerial Employees (Annex No. 2) is available offering a basic framework for the interviews.

3.3. Supporting communication with parents on leave and their involvement in University activities

A special group will be created at MS Teams to maintain contact with parents and provide them with updates on University activities. The group may be joined on a voluntary basis; an HR employee will be in charge of the group.

The University will enable parents during the leave, as far as legally practicable, to take part in various activities such as expert, project or organizational activities, as well as in surveys, strategy development and university events.

3.4. Return to work and career development care

To make the back-to-work transition of employees after the leave as effective as possible, there will be continued communication with their supervisor and the HR. Before returning to work, an interview will be held to discuss employees’ expectations, work-life reconciliation options and career growth plans (see Annex No. 2).

Academic and research employees returning to work after the leave may qualify for University mentoring scheme,⁷ which will support their adaptation and development.

As far as permitted by the University Work Regulations⁸ and in line with the needs of parent employees and the capacity of the respective department, such employees will be offered flexitime, part-time work, remote work or other forms of flexible work arrangements.

In addition, employees will be provided with information about University services and options for parents of children younger than 15 years of age and will receive a handbook for new employees to integrate better during the first days and weeks back at work.

⁷ The goal of mentoring at the University is to support and develop professional and personal growth of employees through a variety of mentoring schemes such as support and assistance from senior colleagues. Mentoring activities may support teaching skills, stress management or time management among other areas.

⁸ Paragraph 6.1 of the University Work Regulations.

4. Examples of measures

- 1) Informing parents on the leave about activities at the University:
 - communication through MS TEAMS, including information about benefits available, training events and organizational changes,
 - informal get-togethers.
- 2) Reasonable involvement during the leave in line with the parents' interest and department capacity:
 - an option to take part, to some extent, in the activities performed before the leave (as long as in compliance with applicable legislation),
 - ad-hoc cooperation instead of hiring new employees under agreements to perform work and complete a job (e.g. assistance when organizing professional, social, cultural and sports activities at the University or the faculty or department).
- 3) Developing employees' skills during the leave:
 - on-line courses and webinars tailored to individual needs (e.g. soft-skills, blended learning, introduction to new University procedures and policies, with on-line guidance and training).
- 4) Use of some facilities and services of the University
 - use of IT services (in compliance with security procedures), the library and on-line sources even during the leave.
- 5) Enhancing services for parent employees with children below the age of 15:
 - a) Flexible work arrangements:
 - reasonable adjustment of start time and end time of daily working hours (e.g. to factor in the opening hours of kindergartens), i.e. specifying a window when a parent employee must be at work but the start and end time will be determined by the parent (specific rules under the Higher Education Act apply to working hours of academic staff),
 - arrangements enabling parent employees to work a different number of hours on individual days (e.g. due to accompanying a child to after-school clubs), i.e. 5 days of 10 hours in a week, or 3 days of 12 hours plus half a day of 4 hours,
 - gradual back-to-work transition with increasing FTE.
 - b) Part-time work options (less than 40 hours a week) depending on the capacity of the department, work and needs of parent employees:
 - working hours scheduled on all (or only some) of the working days,
 - working hours are scheduled by the employer;
 - employees are entitled to salary in proportion to their part-time work.
 - c) Remote work fully replacing on-site work, if permitted by the specific situation at the department.
 - d) Counselling (professional, career and personal) and new services of the Academic Counselling Centre and University Career Centre including services for employees on the leave and employees with children below the age of 15.
 - e) Better facilities for childcare:
 - suitable environment for short-term use by parents with children if they need to arrange something at the University;

- changing tables (in each of the main buildings),
 - relaxation zones for short-term use by parents with children.
- f) University events for children of employees (sports, educational, summer camps, Children's Day etc).

5. Summary

As a modern and progressive employer, the University promotes work-life balance of its employees. This includes attention being paid to employees on the leave and employees taking care of small children, who constitute a disadvantaged group on the labour market. This policy is intended not only for such employees, but also for their supervisors, who are looking for ways not to lose good employees. At the same time, the policy is an invitation to engage in an active discussion about a more friendly and flexible work environment.

Annexes:

Annex No. 1: Handbook for Parents

Annex No. 2: Handbook for Managerial Employees