

Expectant and new parents guide

Stage 3 – Return to work following leave



You probably can't believe the time has passed so quickly!

This is the time when you introduce work back into your life after parental leave and will be seeking to find balance as a working parent.

This section of the guide provides information and resources to assist you with navigating being back at work and parenthood.

Acknowledgment of Country

ACU acknowledges and pay our respects to the First Peoples, the traditional custodians of the lands and waterways. We recognise their spiritual and ongoing cultural connection to Country. We respectfully acknowledge Elders past and present and thank them for their wisdom and guidance as we walk in their footsteps.

A Prayer for Parents

Loving God,
You are the giver of all we possess, the source of all of our blessings.
We thank and praise you.

Thank you for the gift of children.

Help us to set boundaries for them,
and yet encourage them to explore.
Give us the strength and courage to treat each day as a fresh start.

May our children come to know you, the one true God,
and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

May your Holy Spirit help them to grow in faith, hope, and love,
so they may know peace, truth, and goodness.

May their ears hear your voice,
May their eyes see your presence in all things.
May their lips proclaim your word.
May their hearts be your dwelling place.
May their hands do works for charity.
May their feet walk in the way of Jesus Christ, your Son and our Lord.

Amen.

Preparing for your return following leave

Resuming work after such a momentous change in your life and a substantial period of time off, is a big adjustment and may feel daunting. This will look and feel different for each person, as priorities and commitments have shifted. Planning ahead and having discussions with your supervisor about what your return will look like will assist in supporting a smoother transition. This section provides guidance to assist your return to work.

Notice of return following leave

You are required to provide formal notice of your return date or intention not to return, a minimum of four weeks prior to your intended return date. Start with a conversation with your supervisor, that also covers any changes to your working arrangements or patterns, such as temporary changes to part time hours or flexible work arrangements. Following a conversation, the request also needs to be provided in writing. You may have already specified this date in your initial leave application, but you will need to notify if there are any changes to your original plan.

If you intend to resign at the end of your leave, you will need to discuss this with your supervisor as soon as possible, provide sufficient notice (“notice period” as stated in your employment contract) and submit an Employee Separation Form through Staff Connect. For further details about resignation and notice periods, refer to [ACU Notice of Resignation or Retirement Policy](#).

Staff tip: A primary carer returning from leave after the birth, adoption or fostering of a baby or child is entitled to return to their substantive position that they held (including location) prior to commencing this period of leave. Refer to the [ACU Staff Enterprise Agreement](#).

Supervisor tips: Confirm the staff member’s official return date no later than four weeks before the date. If you haven’t received this request, follow this up with your staff member.

Consider the following items when planning for their first day back at work:

- physical workspace is ready (computer, technology, access card, equipment)
- block out time in the calendar to spend with them on day one
- organise a welcome back morning tea with the team
- schedule regular calendar catchups
- assign a buddy/ transition work handover
- plan workload and item prioritisation.

Request to vary working hours or FTE

Upon the completion of leave, you have a right to return to the substantive position you held prior to commencing the leave as long as the period of leave does not exceed 104 weeks. You can return to the same hours and FTE you were previously working and if so, no action is required.

Alternatively, you may request to vary your working hours or FTE on a temporary or permanent basis. A discussion with your supervisor will need to occur in the first instance, and your supervisor will consider the request against the operational needs of the work area before approval is sought. A Request to Vary Form would be submitted through Staff Connect by your supervisor.

Flexible work arrangement

The [ACU Flexible Working Arrangements Policy](#) provides information about a staff member's right to request flexible work arrangements if they:

- need to care for a child who is school age or younger;
- have a child under the age of 18 who has a disability;
- are a carer;
- are a parent or have responsibility for care of a child following return from leave relating to the birth, adoption or foster of a child, or other.

You may request a flexible work arrangement when returning from parental leave that includes the following options:

- Variation to hours being worked.
- Change to the location of work (such as remote or working from home).
- Compressed working hours over a weekly or fortnightly pay period.
- Change in start or finish times to balance childcare arrangements.

All applications should detail the reason for the request and the duration being requested. The university has an obligation to consider the request and to provide the decision in writing, within 21 days. A request may only be refused on reasonable business grounds and these reasons are to be detailed in writing. For further details staff should refer to the [ACU Flexible Working Arrangements Policy](#).

Staff tip: Discuss your plans with your supervisor as soon as practicable **before** lodging a Flexible Work Arrangement form. These arrangements are typically for a period of up to 12 months at a time.

Supervisor tip: Under the [Fair Work Act](#) staff can apply for flexible work arrangements following a return from parental leave. You must provide the decision in writing **within 21** days of the request **and** the request may only be refused on reasonable business grounds. Contact Service Central with any questions **before** finalising a decision.

Creating a work plan

To prepare for your smooth transition from leave to work, you can discuss a work plan with your supervisor. This plan will record your return date and may include any of the following:

- A temporary or permanent request to vary hours or FTE.
- Flexible work arrangements including remote working (working from home), change in work patterns, staggered start/ finish times or change in work location.
- Gaining access to team or other online work sites (if access was temporarily changed or removed whilst on leave).
- Access to required work equipment (if these were handed in prior to the leave, such as laptop or work phone).
- Access to any physical spaces such as feeding rooms and parent facilities.
- Confirmation of work duties that will be resumed including any handover work items, student or research management load (if an academic staff member), setting realistic performance expectations and goals, work travel expectations, career and development planning, promotion planning (if an academic staff member) and any upskilling or training to return to role.
- If a job share work arrangement could be feasible.

Supervisor tip: If a return to work plan is requested, you will need to consider a range of factors that could include:

- Workload and work priorities.
- How to accommodate reasonable adjustments at work.
- Planning for regular breaks during the work day to access feeding rooms.

Childcare arrangements

Resuming work might mean you need to consider childcare arrangements and have these in place before your return. Childcare arrangements will be personal and specific to your own circumstances. Where you need to consider external childcare providers or centres, you are encouraged to make enquiries with them about enrolment or waitlists as soon as practicable.

If you're not across what providers or centres are in your area, the sites listed below are a useful starting point or consider contacting your local council or health care provider.

- [MyGov](#): Finding childcare.
- [Services Australia](#): Childcare providers.
- [Starting Blocks](#): First step into childhood education and care.

You may also qualify for government assistance with the financial cost of childcare ('[childcare subsidy](#)'). Visit [Services Australia](#) using your MyGov account, to enquire further.

Staff tip: In this digital age it's often possible to stay connected with your baby/ child while at work. Ask your childcare provider or centre if you can get updates via a call or an app during your breaks, that will help keep you up to date as to how your baby or child's day is going.

Salary, leave entitlements and superannuation

You will find that your salary (and superannuation contributions) remained the same while you were on leave unless a university-wide enterprise agreement salary increase was applied or you were due for a salary level increment during the period of approved paid leave, which means a salary increase. Additionally, you also continued to accrue leave entitlements (for example recreation or long service leave).

Leave taken at half pay, periods of unpaid leave, and any variances to work hours or FTE upon returning to work, will have an impact on your salary, superannuation contributions and leave entitlements. Log into your Staff Connect to check both your nominal salary rate (via your pay remittance) and leave balances, log a Service Central enquiry or phone for further information. **It is advisable that you make your own enquiries with your superannuation fund or personal financial advisor/accountant for financial advice or prior to make any changes.**

Other forms of leave

There might be occasions when you need to take time off work to:

- care and support a member of the immediate family or household due to unexpected personal illness or injury;
- care for a child on a pupil-free day (school term dates) up to four days per calendar year;
- care for a child or grandchild during the six-month period of date of birth, adoption of fostering; and/or taking care of the grandchild due to unexpected illness, injury or emergency.

Leave associated with these caring responsibilities, is set out in Section 3 of the [ACU Staff Enterprise Agreement](#) and [ACU Personal Leave Policy](#).

Family additions

If you are extending your family through pregnancy, adoption, permanent placement or fostering, another period of leave may be required. Refer to Stage 1 of this guide for 'Leave offerings' or the [ACU Staff Enterprise Agreement](#) for paid and unpaid leave entitlement provisions based on years of service. If you have fallen pregnant while still on leave, you are not required to return to work to be eligible for a new period of parental leave. Reach out to Service Central for more information.

Supporting parents at work

Here are a range of services you might consider accessing to assist you resume work.

- Parent and feeding room locations:
 - Ballarat | Building 106, adjacent to Forbes Student Centre
 - Brisbane | Building 206, Ground Floor, Room 07
 - Canberra | Blackfriars Building, Ground Floor, Room 05
 - Melbourne | The Mary Glowrey Building, Ground Floor near concierge
 - North Sydney | James Carol Building, Level 3, Room 18
 - Strathfield | Between Building 612 & 613.
- Support for Academic Staff: [Childcare Support for Academic Staff Policy](#) and [Research Awards for Academic Staff following Parental Leave Policy](#) and [Procedure](#).
- [Working Parents Workplace Group](#): Online group for parents across ACU.
- [Employee Assistance Program](#): Free counselling and support services as listed on page 7 of this guide.
- [Campus Ministry](#): Embracing peoples of all faiths and traditions.
- [ACU Medical Centres](#): Based in Brisbane, Melbourne and North Sydney offering high-quality healthcare services to staff, students and the local community.
- [Sport Facilities and Gyms](#): Sporting and gym facilities you can access or sign up to as part of your personal health routine.
- Professional Learning and Development: [ACU Staff Learning Hub](#) and [ACU LinkedIn Learning](#).

Some final words

Remember to be kind and patient with yourself, and to not place too much pressure to get the balance of work and parenthood right from day one. For many people, it takes time to find the groove that works best, and we may have to accept that the best laid plans may need to change to meet present needs. Set realistic work expectations for yourself and with your colleagues, for example letting them know if you are finishing early to collect your loved one from care so you can wrap up work for the day, or what days you work so you don't miss out on team meetings or lunch catchups.

You're not alone in this and seeking support from your supervisor, health professionals, family, friends and close colleagues can be helpful. *"It takes a village to raise a child"* (African proverb)

And from us here at ACU, remember to enjoy every moment of your parenthood journey.

External resources for Stage 3

- Finding childcare providers: [MyGov](#) | [Services Australia](#) | [Starting Blocks](#)
- [Health Direct](#): Offering free advice and information.
- [Single Parenting](#) through pregnancy, birth and baby.
- [BabyCenter](#): Community based, resources on all these associated with parenthood.
- CatholicCare/ CentreCare: Loving care to all members of community. Locations: [Ballarat Diocese](#) | [Brisbane Diocese](#) | [Canberra Archdiocese](#) | [Melbourne Archdiocese](#) | [Parramatta Diocese](#) | [Sydney Archdiocese](#)
- [LGBTQIA+](#) and [Rainbow Families](#): Supporting our LGBTQ+ parents and their children.
- [First Nations](#) and [Indigenous.gov.au](#): Supporting First Nations mothers and babies.
- [Parenting with a disability](#)
- [Kidsafe](#): 24-hour line with registered nurses providing advice.
- [Raising kids](#): Australian Government Services Australia site offering payment and services information, to help with the cost of raising a child.
- Helping and assisting on one's mental journey: [BeyondBlue](#) | [MensLine Australia](#)
- Parentline across the country: [NSW](#), [Qld and NT](#), [Vic](#), [ACT](#).
- [Relationships Australia](#): A leader in support services for families, individuals and communities.
- [Raising Children](#): Including teens, children living with autism or a disability.
- [Moneysmart](#): Free tools, tips and guidance in managing finances.
- [MetLife 360 Health Hub](#): Working with UniSuper to support member health and happiness.

Stage 3: Return to work following leave – staff checklist

Print out and tick (if needed) to plan your way through Stage 3

- I advised and submitted notification of my return to work date
- I've decided to resign, discussed this with my supervisor and have lodged an Employee Separation Form through Staff Connect
- If applicable* - I lodged a Request to Vary form for working hours or FTE
- If applicable* - My application for Flexible Work Arrangements in Staff Connect was completed
- If applicable* - I've consulted with my supervisor about a return from leave work plan
- Child care arrangements are coordinated/ arranged before resuming work
- I've considered speaking with my GP about a plan to maintain my health and wellbeing
- I've checked out government financial assistance (eg. the child care subsidy on page 23 of this guide)
- I've familiarised myself with available leave provisions, current leave balances and salary information and read the [ACU Personal Leave Policy](#) and [ACU Compassionate Leave Policy](#)
Where relevant – Seek independent financial or superannuation advice
- I know where to find the parent/ feeding room on campus
- I'm informed about the support services available at work,
- If needed* - Contact Service Central or log an enquiry for more information

Stage 3: Return to work following leave – supervisor checklist

Print out and tick (as needed) for a discussion with your staff member during Stage 3

- One month before leave ends: return date is received in writing OR resignation date with an Employee Separation Form is to be approved
- Review a request to vary working hours or FTE (Request to Vary Form), if received
- Review a request for flexible work arrangements (Flexible Work Arrangements Form) and ensure the decision is shared in writing within 21 days of the request, if received
- If applicable* - Coordinate a return from leave work plan
- Be familiar with [ACU Parental Leave Policy](#), [ACU Personal Leave Policy](#) and [ACU Flexible Working Arrangements Policy](#). Staff member may request a provision associated with their family responsibilities. If you require support or advice lodge a Service Central request for assistance from People and Capability
- Two weeks before leave ends: plan for the staff members first day back (including orientation, access card, reinstate system access if needed)
- One to two weeks before the leave ends: plan a period of work handover between the returning staff member and staff who covered the work (schedule calendar invites, block out calendar times)
- First day back at work: return any work technology and equipment, hold a welcome back morning tea, lunch or virtual event
- Ongoing: schedule regular calendar catchups to check on their transition to resuming work and provide assistance where required
- Where *applicable* - offer support services to the staff member (a full list is available on page 25 of this guide)

