

Maternity Leave Policy



Policy owner: UCD HR

Approval date and body: UMT, 4 November 2025

1. Purpose

University College Dublin is committed to providing an inclusive and diverse environment in which all members of our community are valued and supported, both in the workplace and in their family life. As part of our University's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion the University has a comprehensive suite of family-friendly initiatives and policies available to its employees. The UCD Maternity Leave Policy is one such policy that is intended to reflect the high value the University places on our employees. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that UCD employees are supported before, during and after their maternity leave.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Support for Employees Taking Family-Related Leave Policy.

2. Definitions

Maternity Leave

All pregnant employees, who reach their twenty-third week of pregnancy, are entitled to twenty-six weeks leave. This period of leave is known as maternity leave. Maternity leave must commence at least two weeks before the expected date of the birth and employees must take at least four weeks leave after the date of the birth of the child. Maternity leave is pensionable for pensionable employees.

Additional Unpaid Maternity Leave

Employees, who are entitled to maternity leave, are also entitled to sixteen weeks additional unpaid leave immediately following their maternity leave. This sixteen-week period is known as additional unpaid maternity leave.

Additional unpaid maternity leave is non pensionable (effective 1st December 2014).

Premature Birth

Premature birth shall be understood to be any birth(s) of less than thirty-seven weeks gestation.

In the event of a premature birth the 26 weeks maternity leave will be extended by an additional period of leave. This period of leave will commence at the end of the 26 weeks. The additional period to be added will be the number of weeks from the baby's actual date of birth, up to two weeks before the expected date of confinement, which would have been the 37th week of the pregnancy.

Stillbirths and Miscarriage

Dealing with the loss of a baby can be a difficult and devastating time for parents and families. Employees that experience a stillbirth or miscarriage any time after the 23rd week of pregnancy or if the child has a birth weight of at least 400 grammes, will be entitled to maternity leave and additional maternity leave.

The Employee Assistance Service (EAS) is available to support during this difficult time. Link to [EAS](#)

Maternity Benefit

Maternity Benefit is a payment made to those on maternity leave from work and covered by social insurance (PRSI). Eligible employees are obliged to claim this benefit for the duration of their maternity leave.

Normal Salary

It is the policy of the University to maintain eligible employee's salaries, subject to certain deductions¹, for the duration of maternity leave.

Normal salary shall be understood to mean the amount an employee receives each month/week, excluding any overtime, allowances or premiums, immediately before they begin their maternity leave. Allowances, premiums or any other payment that is in excess of the employee's salary, as per their contract of employment, shall not be paid during a period of maternity leave or taken into account when assessing the employee's salary.

Mother

For the purposes of this policy, a mother shall be understood to be the employee who has given birth to the baby and/or is recorded as the mother of the baby in a register of births.

Father

A father shall be understood to be the biological father of the baby for the purposes of this policy.

Other Relevant Parent

The term 'other relevant parent' shall be understood to be the spouse, civil partner or cohabitant of the mother of the baby.

Serious Health Condition

A 'serious health condition' means a health condition that entails a serious risk to the life or health, including the mental health, of an employee, and in order to address the risk, requires necessary medical intervention that is ongoing for a period of time to be carried out.

3. Scope

This maternity policy applies to all UCD employees who are in receipt of a salary under a permanent contract, a contract of indefinite duration (CID), or a fixed-term contract as defined in the Protection of Employees (Fixed Term Work) Act 2003 and who are entitled to benefit under the consolidated Maternity Protection Acts. Employees employed under a fixed-term or a specified purpose contract of employment, are entitled to maternity leave for the period of the fixed term or specific purpose, as set out in their contract of employment. Any entitlement to leave and payment for same shall last only as long as the term of their contract of employment.

4. Principles

¹ Maternity Benefit shall be deducted from the employee's salary at source.

UCD fosters a culture that embraces equality, diversity and inclusion for all individuals in our community. As such, the principle of equality shall be applied in the interpretation of this policy to ensure that all UCD employees are supported and treated equally before, during and after their maternity leave(s). Furthermore, an employee's absence from work while on maternity leave and additional maternity leave) will count for all employment rights associated with their employment such as annual leave, public holidays and continuity of service.

It is the policy of the University to maintain eligible employee's salaries, subject to certain deductions², for the duration of maternity leave.

Any entitlement to leave and payment for same shall last only as long as the term of the employee's contract of employment.

Ante-natal/post-natal medical care

There are a number of ante-natal/post-natal medical care appointments provided for during pregnancy. Employees are entitled to be paid for these appointments relating to pregnancy.

Written notification must be given to your line manager with the date and time of the appointments at least two weeks in advance. Where possible, for operational reasons it would be preferable if appointments are scheduled at the beginning or at the end of the working day. If the appointment finishes before the end of the working day, you must return to work.

Ante-natal classes

Pregnant employees are entitled to paid time off work to attend one set of ante-natal classes (other than the last three classes in a set as these normally occur when maternity leave has started). This is a once-off entitlement. An expectant father or relevant parents is entitled, on a once-off basis, to paid time off to attend the last two classes before the birth.

Breastfeeding

The Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004 provides an entitlement to paid breastfeeding/lactation breaks - one hour each day away from their work (with pay) or a reduction in work hours in order to breastfeed/lactate. Under the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023, employees will be entitled to take paid breastfeeding/lactating breaks for two years (104 weeks) after the period of confinement, which is an increase from the current 6-month entitlement. This supports employees who are breastfeeding while returning to the workplace.

For further details please see the UCD Breastfeeding Policy.

Hospitalisation of the child

Employees are entitled to request a postponement of their maternity leave in the instance that their child is hospitalised during their maternity leave. Employees can choose to postpone the last 12 weeks of their maternity leave and the maternity leave benefit for a period of up to 6 months.

In order to request this postponement, the employee must already have taken at least 14 weeks maternity leave, with not less than four of those weeks being after the date of confinement.

Requests for a postponement of the leave should be emailed to hrhelpdesk@ucd.ie as soon as possible. This request should also include a letter of confirmation from the hospital. Once approved, the employee will also be required to write to the Department of Social Protection in order to postpone the maternity benefit.

² Maternity Benefit shall be deducted from the employee's salary at source.

Right to pause maternity leave in the event of a Serious health condition

As of the 20th November 2024³, employees' can now postpone all or part of their maternity leave (26 weeks ordinary leave plus 16 additional weeks) for a period of between five weeks and up to one year when receiving treatment for a serious health condition that requires necessary medical intervention. Employees that avail of their right to postpone maternity leave in cases of a serious health condition, are entitled to the remainder of their full maternity leave.

It is important to note there is a difference in how physical and mental health conditions are dealt with. Under the Maternity Protection legislation as amended, 'necessary medical intervention', in relation to mental health, means inpatient hospital treatment and therefore excludes those with mental health conditions that are attending outpatient treatment from being able to postpone their maternity leave.

Postponement process

Employees must notify the hrhelpdesk@ucd.ie if they need to postpone maternity leave.

Employees must give 2 weeks' notice and provide a medical certificate signed by a medical practitioner specifying the relevant commencement and end dates and must be provided to UCD at least 2 weeks before the postponement is due to commence. The medical certificate should confirm that the employee has a serious health condition, in accordance with the definition (in definitions section).

A second and final notification of postponement of the relevant maternity leave is permitted under the Maternity Leave Act but the aggregate amount of postponement must not exceed one year. Employees are required to give 2 weeks' notice and provide a medical certificate signed by a medical practitioner specifying the relevant dates of the proposed second postponement.

If an employee is eligible to postpone their maternity leave due to the hospitalisation of their child and also eligible to postpone their maternity leave in connection with a serious health condition, the legislation will not provide an entitlement to postpone maternity leave under both sections of the Maternity Protection Acts as amended. The employee will have to choose which postponement they wish to avail of.

Pregnancy related sick leave

Section 5.5 of the Managing Attendance & Sick Leave Policy details the provisions related to pregnancy related illness.

Additional maternity leave and sickness

Employees may request to terminate unpaid additional maternity leave in the event of a medically certified illness, thereby allowing the employee to transfer to the UCD sick leave scheme. Employees should send their request to terminate the remainder of their additional maternity leave to sickleave@ucd.ie. The request will be considered in accordance with the UCD Managing Attendance & Sick Leave Policy.

Please note that if you choose to transfer to the sick leave scheme, then the remainder of the additional unpaid maternity leave cannot be taken at a later date following the period of sick leave.

4.1 Breach of the Maternity Leave Policy

³ Maternity Protection, Employment Equality and Preservation of Certain Records Act 2024

Maternity leave(s) shall only be used for its intended purpose. Where the University has reasonable grounds for believing that an employee who is on any period of maternity leave is not using the leave(s) for its intended purpose, the leave(s) may be terminated, and an investigation may be carried out. Disciplinary action may be taken against employees found to be contravening this policy and/or other related policies and procedures.

5. Roles and responsibilities

The Manager should

- a) read this policy in conjunction with the Maternity Leave Procedures and make themselves aware of their obligations;
- b) refer to the Support for Employees Taking Family-Related Leave Policy and make themselves aware of their obligations before, during and when an employee is returning from maternity leave.
- c) ensure a discussion takes place with the employee in preparation for the leave;
- d) sign any necessary documentation; and
- e) promote an environment of equality, diversity and inclusion which support family-friendly initiatives.

The Employee should

- a) read this policy in conjunction with the Maternity Leave Procedures and make themselves aware of their obligations;
- b) provide reasonable notice to their manager in order to ensure they are supported;
- c) make themselves available, where possible, and engage fully with management in planning for the period of absence
- d) complete the relevant documentation within the timelines as set out in the Maternity Procedure Document and submit to the relevant parties;
- e) familiarise themselves with their obligation to claim Maternity Benefit; and
- f) follow UCD's Maternity Leave Policy and Procedure.

Human Resources should

- a) upon request provide advice to employees and their head of school/unit or nominee regarding the employee's entitlements and applications for maternity leave(s);
- b) process all applications for maternity leave(s) in a timely fashion and in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect; and
- c) act with discretion when required and with due regard for the circumstances.

6. Related documents

- Information on Maternity Leave, related policies and procedures can be found on the HR website in the Leave Section
- Support for Employees Taking Family-Related Leave Policy

7. Version history

Version	Date	Description	Author
5.0	April 2012	Policy Versioning Implemented	UCD HR
6.0	December 2012	Policy update to include Neonatal Death and Budget changes regarding Maternity Benefit subject to income tax	UCD HR
7.0	November 2014	Policy updated to confirm that unpaid maternity leave is not pensionable. This is effective for unpaid maternity leave commencing after 1 st December 2014.	UCD HR
8.0	December 2014	Section 3.1 made clearer	UCD HR
8.1	July 2017	References to Paternity Leave removed following the introduction of separate Paternity Leave policy	UCD HR
9.0	February 2019	Removal of the service requirement to receive paid maternity leave, update the rules around premature births and transfer policy to new format.	UCD HR
9.1	July 2020	Policy moved to new template	S. Raleigh, UCD HR
9.2	May 2021	Link to new maternity leave page inserted	P. Fitzgerald, UCD HR
9.3	October 2025	Legislative updates: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Right to request postponement of maternity leave due to a serious medical condition. 2. Right to avail of maternity leave from 23 weeks gestation in the case of miscarriage. 3. Information on ante-natal/post-natal care. 4. Information on postponement of maternity leave. 	HR
9.4	February 2026	Insertion of '16 additional weeks' in paragraph about postponing leave.	K. Conway, UCD HR