Good Practice Guide for Managers: Supporting staff during pregnancy and maternity

The University of York aims to provide an environment where staff are supported and treated fairly and with dignity and respect during pregnancy and maternity and whilst breastfeeding.

In the workplace a woman is protected by law (The Equality Act 2010) against discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy and maternity during the period of her pregnancy and any statutory maternity leave to which she is entitled.

Based on best practice, in departments which have a supportive environment and where families and pregnancy are celebrated, women feel confident and able to talk about pregnancy so early disclosure is more likely. This allows for earlier and more effective planning, both in terms of the needs of the department and of the woman taking maternity leave. All departments should therefore be aiming to create such a positive, supportive environment.

This guidance is prepared with the aim of helping managers, departmental administrators or other members of staff with responsibility for supporting staff during pregnancy and maternity to provide high quality, appropriate support.

Before the maternity leave begins

Provision of information

- ensure that you and the woman you are supporting are familiar with the relevant information on policies, procedures, benefits and entitlements (see list of web pages at the end of this document) including safety issues, annual leave arrangements and time off for ante-natal appointments
- referring to information on the HR web pages, discuss options for flexible working such as job-share or part time work, with reassurance that part time work is equally as valuable as full time and that a return to full time work at a later stage will be agreed where possible.
- identify location of the nearest breastfeeding/expressing facilities on campus or make arrangements within the department and provide this information before the woman goes on maternity leave

Cover for the post

Discuss the planned start date for the maternity leave with the woman you are supporting, then discuss with her and other members of staff how the post might be covered during the maternity leave period.
Arranging good quality cover is essential as this will:

- ensure that the work of the department (for example research) can continue without loss of momentum
- avoid the build-up of a backlog of work which can reduce a department’s efficiency and cause stress for staff and for the woman on her return

There are various ways in which cover may be arranged:

- for staff on research posts, direct support can be provided, for example through appointing a post-doctoral researcher to provide cover. Most research councils and charities provide funding for this purpose.
- a temporary member of staff could be employed, or another member of staff from the department could be temporarily appointed to cover the post
- arrangements could be made so that there are overlap periods at the beginning and end of the maternity leave and beyond to ensure additional support for the woman and continuity of work

A central maternity cost funding scheme exists to cover the additional costs of recruiting fixed-term staff to cover those on maternity leave, in certain circumstances. Advice is available from Departmental Management Accountants.

**During the maternity leave period**

**Keeping in touch**

There are benefits to keeping in touch whilst on maternity leave, both for the woman and her department:

- easier transition back into the workplace on the return to work
- continued identification with the role and department

It is important to establish how often contact will be maintained and with whom. Once this has been done there are various ways in which contact may be maintained:

- involvement in planning arrangements which may affect a woman on her return
- opportunities to participate in departmental social activities which take place during the maternity leave
- use of ‘Keeping in Touch Days’, where a woman may do up to 10 days’ work during her maternity leave period without losing her right to statutory maternity leave or pay

**The return to work**

**Working arrangements**
• plan how to manage the return to work and reintegration for example set up regular review meetings with line managers
• recognise that additional flexibility may be needed during the first few weeks to help cope with new circumstances for example settling a baby into nursery
• allow extended breaks for breastfeeding/expressing if necessary

Useful guidance:

University of York websites:

Maternity Guidelines: http://www.york.ac.uk/admin/hr/resources/policy/maternity.htm

Benefits and entitlements: http://www.york.ac.uk/admin/hr/managers/absence_leave/maternity.htm

Maternity Policy: http://www.york.ac.uk/admin/hr/maternity/

Flexible Working: http://www.york.ac.uk/admin/hr/flexible-working/

Keeping in Touch Days: http://www.york.ac.uk/admin/hr/resources/policy/maternity.htm#C2

Equality and Diversity: www.york.ac.uk/admin/eo/PregnancyMaternity.htm

Useful articles:


Linda Whiting

29 03 2011