



UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

Workforce Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

2016 Parental Leave and Return to Work Survey

Report of Findings

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1 Introduction / Background

The Parental Leave and Return to Work Survey is conducted every 2 years to assess the performance of UOW in providing equitable treatment to staff taking parental leave and our ability to retain this group.

The survey under its previous title, 'Pregnancy and Work' has been conducted since 2008 on a bi-annual basis and this year in the spirit of gender equality, has been retitled. Questions in the survey have been tweaked to be applicable to all respondents and this is appropriate as all genders now have the same parental leave entitlements under the University enterprise agreements.

The report this year is provided with a greater degree of analysis and interpretation and a trends analysis for surveys from 2008 through to 2016 is provided in Appendix 3, to further illustrate trends in staff satisfaction and behaviour.

2 Executive summary

Between 1 July 2014 and 25 June 2016 one hundred and thirty five (135) employees embarked on parental (maternity and paternity) leave. Maternity leave was taken by 134 female staff members in the period and based on head count in June 2016; this represents approximately 10% of female staff in fixed term or permanent employment.

Over the period 2008 to 2014, the number of staff who have taken maternity leave has increased significantly, plateauing in 2016. Table 2.1 below shows growth in the number of female staff taking maternity leave compared to growth in female headcount from 2010-2014 and in 2016 a 2% reduction in headcount. Over the same period, the number of female staff members utilising maternity leave as a percentage of female headcount has increased slightly from 7% in 2009/2010 to 10% in 2015/2016.

Table 2.1

Maternity Leave Trends				
	2009-2010	2011-2012	2013-2014	2015-2016
Female Headcount	1090	1266	1380	1353
<i>% increase headcount</i>	-	16%	9%	-2%
Maternity Leave	71	100	138	134
<i>% increase maternity leave from previous year</i>	-	41%	38%	0%

Invitations to complete the survey were sent to 135 employees with 91 responses (67%) being received. This is a marked improvement on previous response rates (45% in 2014) and is largely due to the survey being offered online in 2016. The findings in this report are based on the analysis of these responses.

The majority (92%) of employees who have taken parental leave in the last two years reported a supportive workplace that made an effort to address and accommodate their needs. Many expressed an appreciation of UOW's parental leave provisions and the support of their colleagues and supervisor. Around a third (30) provided suggestions for additional information that could be provided to staff (37% Academic, 63% Professional Services). Some 26 reported problems or poor behaviours which most often related to job functions when returning to work. They also reported a lack of understanding from peers and supervisors; non inclusive practice or comments and some reported other problems they had encountered including difficulty obtaining information about entitlements; or lack of consultation.

To improve the experience of staff taking parental leave and the workplaces that they return to; to ensure we continue to be a workplace of choice; and to retain valuable staff, it is recommended that managers and staff are better engaged and informed through training or communication exercises and that relevant web pages be reviewed and updated.

Areas for improvement most often related to the provision of information (30%) before and during parental leave and upon returning to work compared to 13% of respondents in 2014. The application of entitlements and conditions (19%) and support (15%) by managers and supervisors were also prevalent in suggestions for improvement. A more detailed breakdown of suggestions is explored further in Section 4.

3 Methodology

The survey questionnaire used in 2016 maintains continuity with previous years however some questions have been reformatted or repositioned to improve survey flow and efficiency and to make questions applicable to all genders. The survey was also provided online via Survey Monkey this year with the majority of participants receiving the link to the survey via email. A number of participants received the invitation by mail.

Records in the Human Resource's Ascender Pay system were used to identify the contact details of employees who have taken parental leave in the relevant period. After removal of individuals with international or incomplete addresses, 135 survey invitations were sent. Ninety one (91) responses were received, representing a 67% response rate. A table showing survey volume and response rates for 2016 and previous surveys is shown in table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1

Survey Participation				
	2009-2010	2011-2012	2013-2014	2015-2016
Surveys issued	71	100	134	135
Responses received	42	62	60	91
Response rate	59%	62%	45%	67%

The data from completed questionnaires was captured in the Survey Monkey analytics package, which was used to report these survey findings.

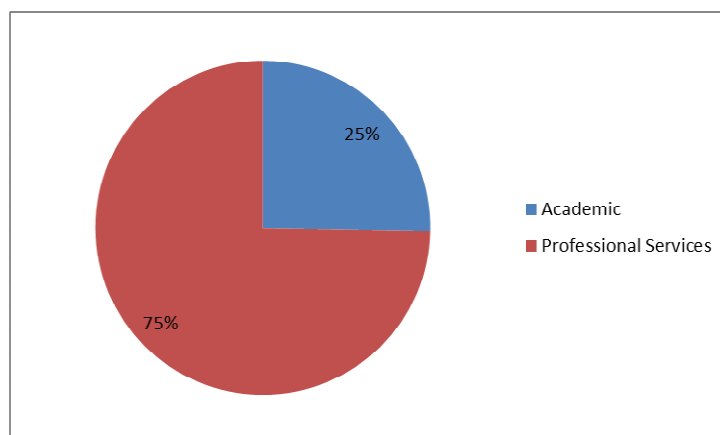
4 Results

4.1 Participant Profile

From the sample of 91 responses, 100% of respondents were still employed with UOW and 84% of these had returned to work, with the remainder still on parental leave.

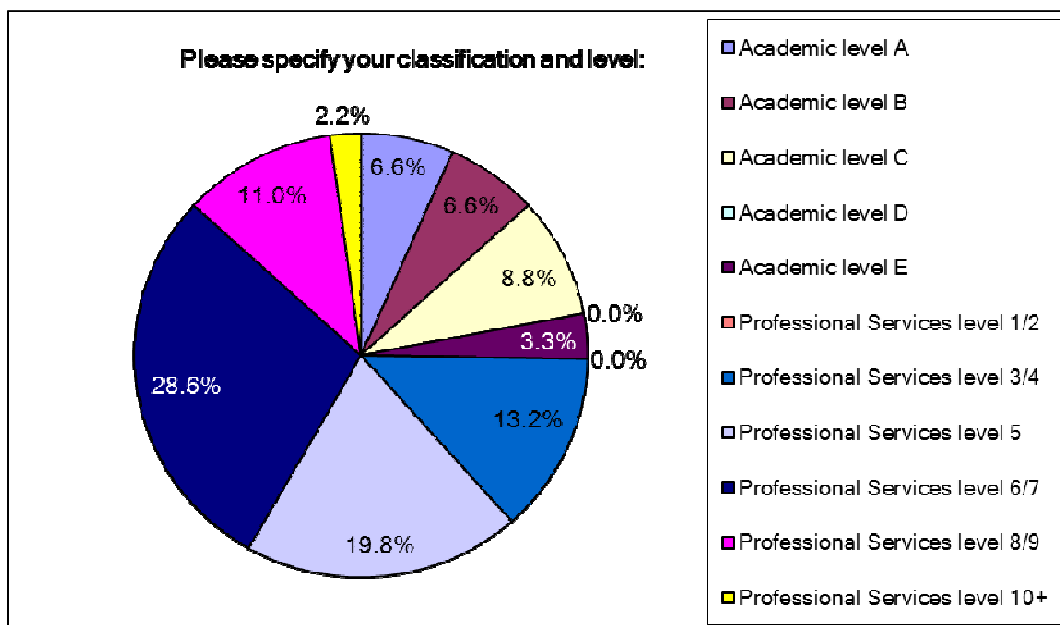
The proportion of Academics versus Professional Services Staff who have taken parental leave in the relevant two-year period is shown in Graph 4.1 below. Around three quarters of those taking maternity leave were Professional Services Staff. The average of paid leave reported was 26 weeks (22 for academics and 23 for professional services staff) and for unpaid leave the average reported was 16 weeks (6 and 20 weeks respectively).

Graph 4.1



Females represent more than two thirds of Professional Services staff (permanent and fixed term) which is vastly different from the academic cohort, where women occupy 42% of roles. 5.1% of Academic Staff and 7.4% of Professional Services Staff have taken parental leave during the relevant period. This shows that when considering the frequency at which staff take parental leave, Academics are less likely to take this form of leave, however the rate has almost doubled since 2014 when it was at 2.9%. The most common levels for those taking parental leave are Level C and below for Academics and Level 6/7 and below for Professional Services Staff (see graph 4.2).

Graph 4.2



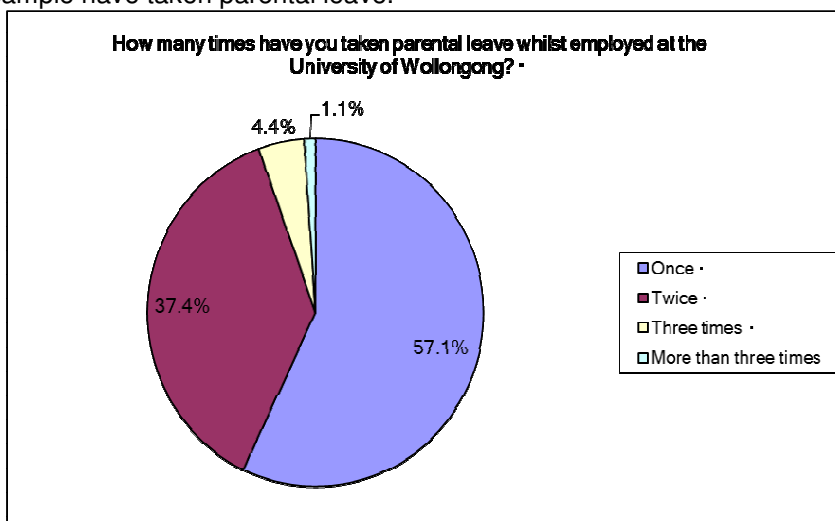
Other characteristics of the sample were:

- The survey contained 1 respondent with a disability requiring a workplace adjustment
- The survey contained 3 staff who identified as Aboriginal people
- 14% of respondents reported a non-English speaking background.

4.2 Findings

More than 42% of respondents have taken parental leave more than once, with 57.1% reporting their first parental leave and 37.4% their second, which are a similar quantum to the 2014 survey. Graph 4.3 shows how often the respondents in the sample have taken parental leave.

Graph 4.3



Finding Information

To find information about parental leave entitlements, almost 74% of respondents reported their source was a HR Advisor/Human Resources. The next most popular option was the Staff Intranet (Enterprise Agreement) at just over 69% followed by Friends/Colleagues and Faculty/Supervisor. These themes are consistent with the 2014 survey with a slight increase in people contacting HR for information. Table 4.1 shows the frequency of sources that respondents used to obtain information about their entitlements.

Table 4.1

Where did you get information about your entitlements? Please select all options that apply.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
HR Advisor/ Human Resources	74.7%	68
Parental Leave Information Session	17.6%	16
Work/Life Balance Website	4.4%	4
Staff Intranet (Enterprise Agreement)	69.2%	63
UOW Policy Index	6.6%	6
Faculty/ Supervisor	20.9%	19
Friends/ Colleagues	40.7%	37
Other (please specify)	6.6%	6

“Other” responses included Government websites such as Fair Work Australia. Intranet locations such as Work/Life Balance and UOW Policy Index had minimal usage and this reinforces the need to review and reduce information under the old ‘EED Unit” banner and to re-brand and relaunch this information.

Leave Terms

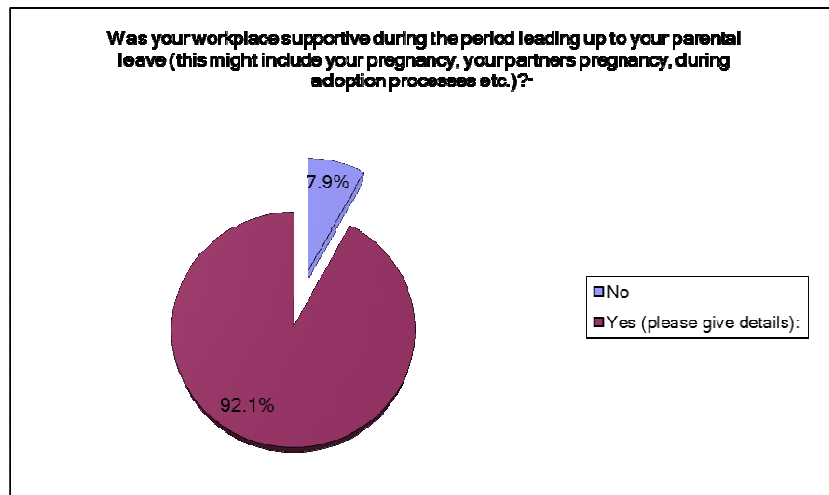
Three respondents indicated they were ineligible to take paid parental leave; the remaining staff all took advantage of paid parental leave. The average weeks of paid leave were 25 (22 for academics and 23 for professional services staff) and this was combined with unpaid leave, the average taken being 16 weeks (6 and 20 weeks respectively). The average of paid leave taken was higher compared to 2014 (22 weeks) and the average of unpaid leave taken was lower (19 weeks). As with the 2014 survey, 92% of respondents in 2016 received the Federal Government’s paid parental leave grant and more than 68% of these reported that this entitlement had influenced their decision to take a longer period of leave.

Workplace Support

The majority of respondents (>92%) reported that their workplace was supportive during the period leading up to their parental leave (Graph 4.4) and the same percentage reported that during their parental leave, they had contact with the University. Most of these combined a social activity with the provision of advice or information around return to work or job content. Many reported visits to introduce baby and responding to work emails during parental leave.

In 2014, more than 90% of respondents considered their supervisor and their colleagues to be supportive when they returned to work after parental leave. This has been maintained with 92% and 95% respectively, reporting support from their supervisor and their colleagues in the 2016 survey.

Graph 4.4



Examples provided of positive workplace support included:

- Open and transparent discussions about leaving and returning to work
- Parental leave provisions and progressive return to work
- Adapting work space to providing a suitable place to breast feed
- Ability to attend doctor's appointments
- An inclusive and positive attitude
- Flexible work practices
- Modifying work load

Although many respondents reported that their supervisor or colleagues were supportive in general after return to work, 35% of respondents reported that they encountered some workplace problems. Examples provided where workplaces or supervisors were not supportive included:

"I felt pressured to take on more work"

"There is always a little animosity among those who do not have children"

"I have lost my job security"

"Lack of awareness of family responsibilities and shared parenting"

"Colleagues commenting that I have it easier as I am part time"

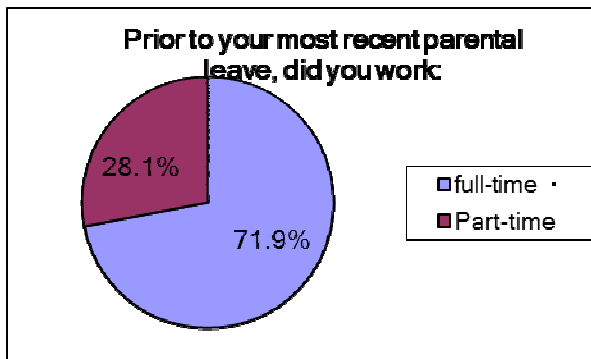
"Breastfeeding was difficult"

"EAP service was contacted regarding the ongoing nature of my mistreatment"

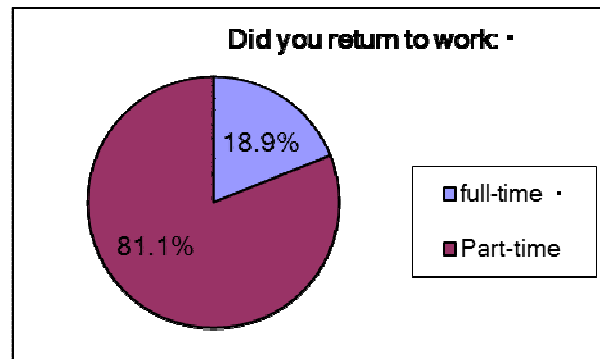
Returning to Work

The majority of respondents (72%) report that they were employed in a full time capacity before parental leave (see Graph 4.5) and 81% of staff returning from parental leave returned in a part time capacity (see Graph 4.6). 73% of respondents returned on temporary arrangements and of those, 30% have returned to their substantive position, 61% are still working under temporary arrangements and 9% relinquished their substantive role and continue on alternate hours in another position.

Graph 4.5



Graph 4.6



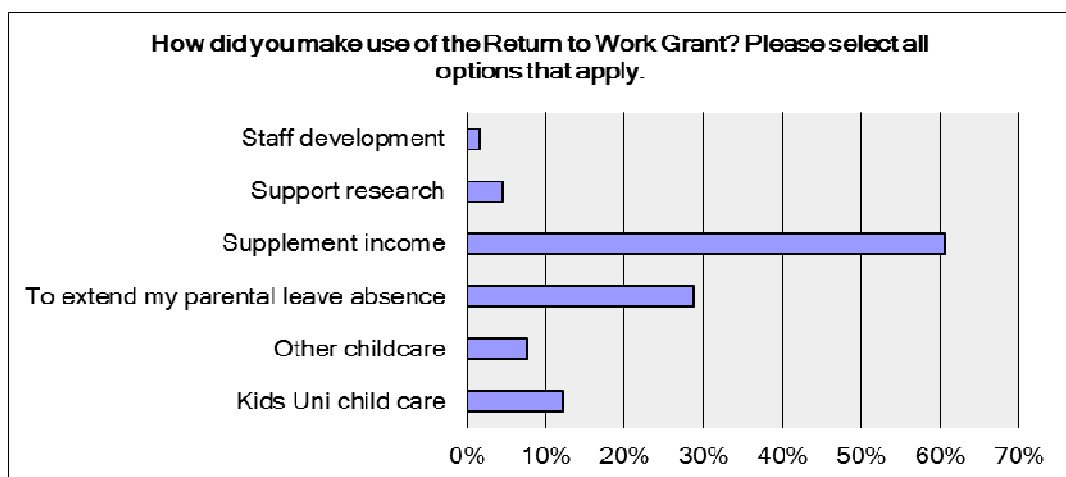
For those who returned part-time, 68% reported working 21 hours per week or above. Most employees returned to either the same role or a role at the same level as their job prior to parental leave.

Table 4.2

When you returned to work, what was the level of the job?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
The same as or equivalent level as the job I held before	94.6%	70
A higher level job	1.4%	1
A lower level job	4.1%	3

Eight staff were not eligible to receive the Return to Work grant. All others (89%) advised that they have made use of the grant. Most common uses were supplementing income (61%) and to extend the parental leave absence (29%). Graph 4.7 shows how the grant has been used by survey respondents. Compared to the 2014 survey, supplementing income has reduced by 12% and extending parental leave has increased by 24%.

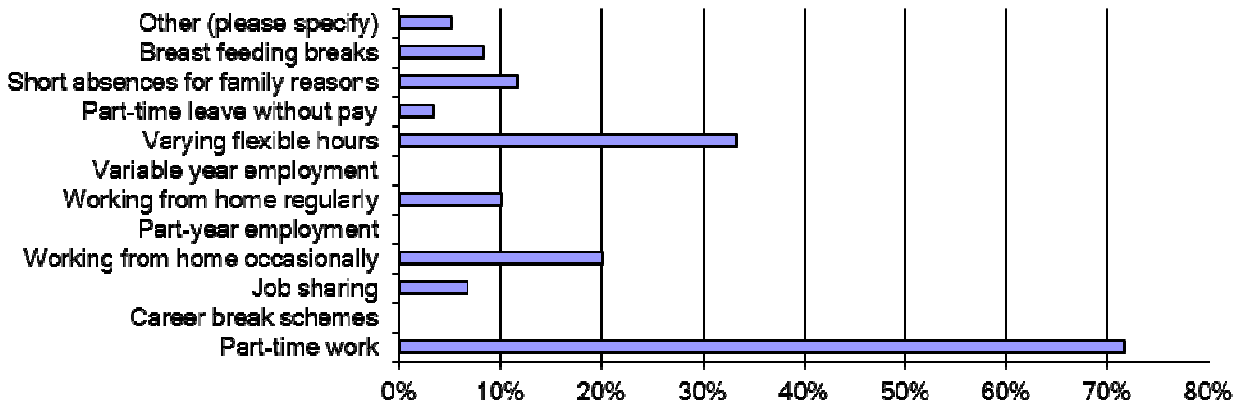
Graph 4.7



Since returning to work, 80% of respondents have used flexible work practices to meet family commitments; this is lower than the 2014 survey, 85%. The most common of these were part time work, varying flexible hours and occasional work from home. A distribution of the practices utilised is shown in Graph 4.8.

Graph 4.8

Which flexible work practices did you use? Please select all options that apply.



In the 2014 survey, 31% of respondents reported problems returning to work and in the current survey this has increased slightly to 35% with the following common issues identified:

- Lack of places to express milk/breast feed
- Unrealistic workload demands when returning to work
- My supervisor was very strict about “flexible work practices”
- I was moved
- I was only ever seen as a temporary member of staff and wasn’t given any direction by my supervisor
- Part time employees are treated differently where I work
- Uncertainty of employment when pregnant in a fixed term/casual environment

In the current survey, 2% (2) of respondents indicated they had lodged a complaint about an issue related to their parental leave and return to work; this is lower than the 2014 result of 7%. Both issues had to do with the supervisor; one was resolved through a formal process and the other was resolved in-house.

More than one third of respondents provided their contact details and were willing to participate in a follow-up interview.

Suggestions for Improvement

More than half the respondents (47) provided suggestions for improvements. Common areas included:

- Improve information, education and awareness (36%)
- Improve entitlements (21%)
- Improve support (15%)
- Provision of breastfeeding facilities (11%)
- Apply flexibility (7%)

Improve information, education and awareness suggestions:

Providing information or training to all new managers; providing advice to teams who will have someone returning from parental leave; better education of managers regarding policy and provisions; improve the

“work/life balance website”; clearer instructions on how to consider career breaks and part-time work for career progression.

Suggestions for improving entitlements:

It would be good to maintain the Federal entitlements along with those provided by the University; provide clarity for people on fixed term contracts; extend the term of the contract when on parental leave; extend flexible return to work arrangements until children are of school age; extend the eligible period for the return to work grant.

Suggestions for improving support:

Better support for researchers funded by external agencies who take parental leave; train supervisors to be more supportive with changes to return to work plans as circumstances can change; there is not sufficient understanding by colleagues about the demands on people who are on parental leave; there is no “neutral” entity to talk to about support needs.

Suggestions regarding facilities included:

More baby change facilities and more places for breast feeding; the University should openly advocate breastfeeding at work; information sessions would be useful.

Improving flexibility includes the following suggestions:

Allow more job sharing; support working from home; conduct networking events during work hours; parental responsibilities accommodated in timetabling of lectures; more part time opportunities at higher levels; and easier return to work for employees on contract.

5 Recommendations

UOW aspires to promote a safe and supportive workplace where our distinctive values of collaboration, teamwork, equity, diversity and inclusive practices thrive. In 2016, UOW was named as a an Employer of Choice for Gender Equity (EOCGE) and to maintain this highly recognised achievement, UOW intends to fully support gender equity initiatives, many of which relate to parental leave and return to work processes.

In 2015, the University was also one of the first institutions to sign the charter for the Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) pilot project of Athena SWAN, a successful UK program targeting the under representation of women in traditionally male dominated disciplines. This process requires UOW to report on current practices for flexible working and managing career breaks and provide a 4 year action plan of policies, initiatives and programs to address issues and to increase the retention of staff members taking parental leave.

Women taking maternity leave represent around 6% of total staff (10% of female staff) over a two year period. This is a significant group and the mechanisms used to retain this group are important for talent retention and to ensure ongoing gender diversity at UOW. Work life balance can help the University to do this, and it also has the capacity to attract and retain the best employees.

The most common suggestions, problems and solutions are discussed below:

Parental leave return to work grant: it is recommended to provide more flexibility in the application of the grant, including buying out teaching workloads, employment of research assistants and streamlining of current salary supplementation and childcare administrative arrangements. It is also recommended to extend the period for accessing the grant beyond 104 weeks from the birth or adoption of the child and also to re-launch the entitlement to raise the awareness of all staff (including men) about the benefits of the program.

Workforce Diversity and Human Resource Services will review and update relevant sections of the Parental Leave – Guide for Expectant Parents and distribute for consultation. Once finalised and approved, the guideline will be relaunched during 2017.

Access to advice on conditions and entitlements: HR Business Partners in the Employment Relations Team, Human Resources Division can advise staff members on their entitlements for parental leave. Advice is also available for Supervisors to ensure the best possible outcomes are achieved when negotiating with members of staff applying for parental leave. The team has also put together a plain English guide with links to a range of information including the Federal Government's paid parental leave scheme. It is recommended that access to this advice is promoted on the staff intranet and that information is updated once there is full clarity about changes to the Federal Government's paid parental leave scheme.

Employment Relations will update current information about parental leave entitlements on the staff intranet during 2017.

Accommodating Parental Responsibility: It is recommended "Family Friendly" guidelines be developed where work extends beyond the normal working hours of 9am to 5pm. Employees should be consulted and work times negotiated with sufficient notice to allow for suitable child care arrangements. The family friendly work guidelines would include direction on the suitable span of hours for work based meetings, teaching hours, email etiquette after hours and on weekends.

Workforce Diversity will develop family friendly guidelines during the third quarter of 2017 and distribute once approved.

Information, Education and Communication: It is recommended to re-introduce parental leave information sessions for staff to provide clarity on entitlements and to answer questions. A workshop for managers/supervisors should also be developed to raise awareness about return to work processes and entitlements for flexible work practices and other support mechanisms for staff returning from parental leave. Education and communication could be further enhanced by an upgrade of existing forms and web pages, including the Work/Life Balance site.

Workforce Diversity will work with Professional and Organisational Development and Employment Relations to produce information sessions appropriate for staff members and supervisors by the last quarter of 2017. Existing networks will be targeted to deliver the workshops, for example the Early Career Academic Network.

Further research: The final question of the survey asked respondents if they were willing to participate in an interview and 35 people provided their contact details. It is recommended to conduct further investigation using a structured interview technique and to submit an ethics application so that results can be published.

The Workforce Diversity Reference Group has agreed to support this additional research, to be completed by the end of June 2017.

A full listing of suggestions is provided in appendix 2.

Appendix 1 – Survey Questions

1. Are you currently on a parental leave absence?
2. How many times have you taken parental leave whilst employed at the University of Wollongong?
3. Where did you get information about your entitlements?
4. Did you take paid parental leave?
reason
weeks of paid leave
weeks of unpaid leave
5. Did you receive the Federal Government's Paid Parental Leave?
6. If yes, did this influence the total period of parental leave you took?
7. Was your workplace supportive during the period leading up to your parental leave?
details
8. During your parental leave did you have contact with the University and/or with your workplace? e.g. social or work related
Describe
9. Prior to your most recent parental leave, did you work:
Full-time
Part-time
10. Did you return to work:
Full-time
Part-time
11. Did you return to work on temporary arrangements?
12. If you returned to work on temporary arrangements, did you subsequently return to the substantive hours of your position?
13. When you returned to work, what was the level of the job?
Comment on the level/type of work you returned to: _
14. Were you entitled to receive the Return to Work Grant?
15. How did you make use of the Return to Work Grant?
16. Did you make use of the University's Work/Life Balance web site to find information about leave entitlements and workplace flexibility?
suggestions
17. Since your return to work, have you used flexible work practices (eg. part-time work, working from home) to meet family commitments?
Which flexible work practices did you use?
18. Were you aware of the availability of 'breast feeding fridges' at the University?
19. Since your return to work has your supervisor been supportive?
20. Since your return to work have your colleagues been supportive?
21. Did you encounter any workplace problems concerning your return to work?

describe

22. **Have you ever lodged a complaint about any issue connected with pregnancy, adoption or return to work after parental leave?**
describe

23. **Do you have any comments or suggestions for improvements?**

Appendix 2 - Suggestions for improvement

Respondents were asked how the parental leave process could be improved. Positive and constructive responses are provided below:

- At many other universities there are far more family friendly policies in place, such as entitlement to full maternity leave if the contract ends after the woman is 16 weeks pregnant;
- Better training for Managers and Supervisors around supporting staff on leave & during their return;
- 21st century flexible work policies for all staff (within reason);
- I think HR need to make the process a bit clearer from their end especially the forms etc.;
- More info about the paperwork process for gradual return to work;
- Information session would be helpful, I believe it was offered in the past but no longer available;
- The University should openly advocate breastfeeding and provide more fridges for staff to use when expressing milk at work;
- More info re: government parental leave;
- Clear point form info on what and who is entitled to employer and government schemes - we have to read through so much detail;
- Educate the directors of institutes and decision makers about the regulations of UOW for parental leave;
- Clearer instructions for how to consider career breaks and part-time work for career progression;
- Adjust guidelines for internal funding schemes to account for career breaks and part-time work;
- Keeping staff on mail lists to stay up to date with any work place news/changes etc;
- It would be great if the entitlements stay as they are in regards to being able to utilise the governments leave and your workplace leave which allows new mothers to have the first 12 months off without financial burden;
- I found the payroll and HR very knowledgeable around my leave entitlements;
- There is a lot of room for improvement, in negotiating my return to work it has been stressful, drawn out, emotional and unsupportive;
- More support/options and an open mind needed from senior staff regarding working from home arrangements and job share possibilities when returning from maternity leave;
- I would have preferred someone to have advised me when I originally requested the temporary hours that I could not change back to my normal work hours at an earlier date than requested;
- More communication around entitlements for flexible work arrangements;
- The process for staff on contract who have worked for the uni for a long period of time is very uncertain, stressful and poorly managed;
- I couldn't praise my team more when it comes to being supportive, flexible and understanding of the needs that come with having three little kids;
- I have always found the HR processes a little cumbersome but HR staff are generally happy to talk through any questions I've had;
- More designated breastfeeding spaces, one particularly in building 36;

- When job duties change as a result of going from full-time to part-time work, make sure there is clear communication around it;
- There is a need for much better support for researchers funded by external agencies e.g. NHMRC, ARC. These agencies have good equal opportunity policies and so does UOW, but in reality it was extremely stressful having to arrange the appropriate extensions to my contract after (i) maternity leave and then (ii) part-time employment;
- My HOS, HOD, and colleagues generally have been fantastic. I cannot be more positive about the experience I have had as an employee of UOW at this time.
- Allowing the suspension of contracts for staff in research positions;
- I feel very grateful for the treatment I have had and I work hard to repay them;
- While there is support at the University level, I do not think there is sufficient understanding by some colleagues at the discipline level;
- Having the ability to work part time until kids are of school age without the implications on job level and role;
- More flexibility and being able to work from home;
- It would be better if HR could provide an information package or have a meeting with those who are going to take parental leave;
- I'd like more information on how to negotiate work times and different types of flexibility allowed on return to work;
- returning to work full time after parental leave is very stressful, only some colleagues are supportive, it feels like there is no-one neutral to talk to;
- I think the parental leave scheme here is fantastic- wouldn't change a thing!
- I would like if someone from HR would check up on me even once to discuss how things are going and suggest how I could negotiate things which are within my rights;
- My only negative was that if I wanted to use some of my recreational leave directly before I went on my parental leave or directly after my parental leave finished, that it would have been included in my 52 weeks of leave, and therefore would have missed out on using the return to work grant;
- My experience with pregnancy and return to work at UOW has been extremely positive. Every employee I have spoken to was knowledgeable and supportive and I feel very lucky to be a part of the team I work within. I am also grateful for the return to work grant which has helped my family and I substantially adjust to me returning to work. I think it is a wonderful initiative to keep.

Appendix 3 - Survey trends 2008-2016

Table of findings		2016	20014	2012	2010	2008
Q1	I am currently an employee of the University of Wollongong?	100%	95%	98%	100%	95%
Q2	I am an Academic	25%	22%	32%	48%	53%
Q4	I am of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent	3.3%	0%	2%	0%	3%
Q5	I first spoke English as a child	86%	83%	77%	88%	79%
Q6	I am a person with disability?	1%	2%	0%	2%	0%
Q8	I am currently on a maternity leave absence?	16%	26%	26%	19%	13%
Q9.1	I have taken maternity leave once only	57%	52%	44%	67%	74%
Q9.2	I have taken maternity leave twice	37%	35%	45%	31%	21%
Q9.3	I have taken maternity leave more than twice	6%	13%	11%	2%	5%
Q10	Most people got information about their entitlements from:	HR Advisor/HR	HR Advisor/HR	HR Advisor/HR	Intranet	Intranet
Q11	On the last maternity leave occasion, I took paid maternity leave	96%	98%	95%	100%	95%
Q13.1	Average number of paid weeks leave	25	22	21	21	18
Q13.2	Average number of unpaid paid weeks leave	16	19	22	22	20
Q14	Proportion who received the Federal Government's Paid Parental Leave during your maternity leave	92%	92%	56%	12%	NA
Q15	This influenced the total period of maternity leave that I took?	68%	53%	29%	95%	NA
Q16	My workplace was supportive during my pregnancy	92%	90%	98%	98%	92%
Q17	I had contact with the University and/or workplace during your maternity leave	92%	90%	98%	83%	97%
Q18	I normally work full-time	72%	68%	75%	86%	76%
Q19	I returned to work full-time	19%	18%	12%	12%	28%
Q7	Average number of hours worked now		20	23	24	26
Q20	I returned on temporary part-time arrangements, but subsequently return to substantive hours	30%	100%	60%	NA	NA
Q21	When I returned to work, the level of the job was the same	95%	91%	93%	95%	83%
Q22	I was entitled to receive the Return to Work Grant	89%	94%	93%	NA	NA
Q23	I made use of the Return to Work Grant	73%	73%	92%	95%	91%
Q24.1	I used the grant as an income supplement	61%	77%	82%	90%	58%
Q24.2	I used the grant for Kids Uni	12%	11%	19%	21%	35%
Q24.3	I used the grant for other childcare	8%	11%	6%	10%	16%
Q25	I made use of EED's Work/Life Balance website	15%	19%	22%	19%	19%
Q26	Since returning to work, I have you used flexible work practices to meet family commitments	80%	85%	88%	93%	90%
Q27.1	I have used part time work	72%	80%	82%	89%	81%
Q27.2	I have used flexible hours	33%	33%	35%	24%	33%
Q27.3	I have used work from home occasionally	20%	33%	29%	41%	37%
Q27.4	I have used short term absences	12%	25%	26%	24%	26%
Q27.5	I have used breast feeding breaks	8%	13%	16%	NA	NA
Q28	I was aware of the availability of the 'breast feeding fridges'	24%	47%	12%	NA	NA
Q29	Since your return to work, my supervisor has been supportive	92%	93%	95%	97%	94%
Q30	Since your return to work, my colleagues have been supportive	95%	98%	95%	95%	94%
Q31	I did encounter a workplace problems regarding return to work	35%	30%	27%	38%	39%
Q32	I have lodged a complaint about any issue connected with pregnancy or return to work after pregnancy	2%	7%	7%	2%	3%