Guidance on supporting working parents and carers
Why is it so important to support staff with dependents?

3 million people in the UK juggle paid work with unpaid caring responsibilities: 1 in 7 people in any workforce. Looking after dependents is an issue that is likely to affect the majority of the workforce at some point in their working lives, particularly as people are living longer. In the UK, the majority of those who undertake unpaid care are women (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008).

UCL has a long history of being inclusive. For this value to have meaning today it is crucial that it is translated into the 21st century working environment. What this means in this context is that every effort should be made to support those with responsibilities outside work to achieve a sustainable work-life balance, not only in the interests of equality but also in the interests of staff wellbeing. Getting a work-life balance is important for all staff, but may be a particular challenge for those with busy family lives.

As a forward-looking institution UCL has a role to play in transforming traditional gender roles so that men feel empowered to play an active role in supporting their partners by looking after their young families and other dependents. We recognise that the family unit is very different from twenty or thirty years ago and that there are more lone parents, gay parents, step families and other non-traditional arrangements. People tend to live further from their extended families, especially international staff, so there is less informal support. Travelling long distances to care for elderly relatives can be stressful and time consuming.

If staff can be supported in managing a sustainable work-life balance they are likely to stay at the organisation, be loyal and go the extra mile when asked. A reduction in stress levels is also likely to lead to a more productive and harmonious workforce more generally.

Professor Mary Collins
Dean of Life Sciences & UCL’s Gender Equality Champion

Case Study 1 - Compressed hours

“When I applied to work a compressed nine working day fortnight in April 2005, my daughter Daisy was 2 years old, and my son Will was 6. Trying to balance demanding working hours, domestic responsibilities, and the cost of childcare, gave me the impetus to really put my family first. I wanted to play a far more hands-on parental role at this formative stage of their lives. My manager and team were happy to pilot the arrangement, which I still refer to as ‘Daisy Days’, and I am glad to say it has worked so well that not only do I still work compressed hours (gradually reduced on my request to two days per school term), but many colleagues still do not realise that I do so! The flexibility works both ways and my Daisy Days are fitted around work priorities. Thanks to UCL, and my past and present manager, I have spent much more quality 1-2-1 time with Daisy, I have been able to do much more in and around school, and even now I can be there for the odd assembly, to pick up from school, and simply to be around for the children and my wife on a school day.”

Bob Carey
Senior Human Resources Consultant
In recent years a number of working rights and entitlements have been put in place to support working parents and other staff with dependents:

- Right to request flexible working – the Employment Act (amended 2007) provides for parents of children under 16 (or 18 if the child is disabled) and carers of adults the ‘right to request’ flexible working arrangements. Any request must be given serious consideration by the employer.
- Maternity benefits - including paid time off antenatal appointments and 52 weeks maternity leave.
- Paternity/partners leave (inclusive of same sex couples) – up to 2 weeks paid leave following the birth of the baby.
- Additional Paternity Regulations – in place since 2010, this allows the father/partner of a woman who has had a baby to take up to an additional 20 weeks leave, if the mother returns to work before the of her full maternity leave entitlement. Further information about this can be found on the ACAS website [http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1806](http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1806)
- Parental leave – allows for parents to take up to 18 weeks of unpaid leave before their child’s fifth birthday or before the 18th birthday if the child is disabled.

The Equality Act 2010 has specific legal provisions that relate to staff with dependents:

- Discrimination by association – the concept of ‘discrimination by association’ was introduced as a result of the *Coleman v Attridge* case in 2008, which concerned a woman with a disabled child who requested time off to look after her disabled son. The request was, unreasonably, refused and it was established that Coleman was discriminated by virtue of her connection to her disabled son, even though she wasn’t actually disabled herself. The concept of discrimination by association was enshrined in the Equality Act 2010 and applies to the other ‘protected characteristics’ of the Act, such as age, religion and belief and sexual orientation. In the context of looking after dependents, what this means is a carer of, for example, an elderly relative could potentially be protected by age discrimination legislation if they were treated less favourably in the workplace.

- Indirect sex discrimination – recent case law *Cooper v House of Fraser* has established that inflexible working practices, and a requirement to work full time in particular, have a much greater impact on females than males as a group, due to the fact that women undertake the majority of unpaid care work. Previous case law had asserted that this was not a sex discrimination issue.
UCL’s policies

UCL’s policies are based on best practice and exceed the legal requirements in this area, providing for example, excellent maternity leave provision and the right to request flexible working for all staff:

- Maternity policy – provides 18 weeks leave on full pay, regardless of length of service plus statutory maternity pay for those who qualify. [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/docs/maternity_policy.php](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/docs/maternity_policy.php)
- Paternity leave – UCL has very generous provision for fathers/partners (in same sex relationships) giving up to 20 days paid leave, regardless of length of service [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/docs/leave_domest_personal_reasons.php#4](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/docs/leave_domest_personal_reasons.php#4)
- Sabbatical leave policy – provides a term free from teaching commitments for research-active staff returning from maternity leave, adoption leave, extended carer’s leave or long term sick leave to get their research back on track (para. 9) [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/docs/sabbatical.php](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/docs/sabbatical.php)
- Leave for Domestic and Personal reasons – includes paternity, adoption leave, carers leave (including when dependents are ill), time off for other unforeseen circumstances [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/docs/leave_domest_personal_reasons.php](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/docs/leave_domest_personal_reasons.php)
- Work-life balance policy – includes the right to request flexible working for all staff and gives examples of different working options. Managers must give each case proper consideration, only taking into account legitimate business reasons. It is not always necessary to formalise arrangements, although a contractual matter such as a reduction in hours will need to be confirmed in writing. The process for making a flexible working application can be found at Appendix 2 [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/)

**Case Study 2 - Flexible Working**

“I am lead of UCL Medical School’s Medical Ethics and Law Unit and academic lead of the Medical School’s widening participation project *Target Medicine.* I am also a practicing clinician in Sexual and Reproductive Health and have three kids under the age of thirteen. Balancing work and childcare responsibilities can be a tricky business. Fortunately, UCL’s flexible working policy allows me to adjust my work time around family commitments. This means I can take a couple of hours out of my working day to see a school concert or accompany my daughter to the dentist and make up the time during evenings or weekends when my partner Nicola can look after the kids. Moreover, the general positive and supportive attitude towards members of staff with dependents that permeates my department means that I don’t feel guilty watching my 9 year old murder *Greased Lightning* at her school’s X Factor concert while my colleagues are hard at work.”

**Dr Jayne Kavanagh**

Principal Clinical Teaching Fellow, UCL Medical School
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UCL’s Services

- **UCL Day Nursery** – UCL has a day nursery which can accommodate up to 62 children between the ages of 3 months and 5 years
  [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/current-students/support/wellbeing/day_nursery](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/current-students/support/wellbeing/day_nursery)

- **Employee Assistance Programme** – an external employee support service that is free to UCL staff, which gives advice and counselling on a number of topics, including parenting, wellbeing and workplace issues
  [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/occ_health/services/emp_assistance_program.php](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/occ_health/services/emp_assistance_program.php)

- **VPN and remote working** – UCL has a remote access VPN service to enable staff to connect in UCL’s IT systems from off-site locations. Access to VPN is restricted so staff will need their manager’s permission to use the service
  [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/isd/staff/network/vpn](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/isd/staff/network/vpn)

- **Childcare vouchers** – UCL operates a salary sacrifice childcare voucher scheme to make the cost of childcare more affordable
  [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/docs/childcare_voucher_scheme.php](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/docs/childcare_voucher_scheme.php)

- **Parents and carers email group** - a new email network has been set up so that parents and carers at UCL can provide peer-to-peer support and share ideas on how best to achieve a work-life balance. To join the group email Sonal Bharadva
  s.bharadva@ucl.ac.uk

- **Specialist human resources advice** – for advice on individual workplace issues staff can contact the HR Consultant for their area
  [http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/consultancy/index.php](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/consultancy/index.php)

- **Equalities and Diversity Team** – for advice on diversity-related matters, such as gender equality issues, contact equalities@ucl.ac.uk

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Case Study 3 - Remote Working

“I joined UCL in Aug 2007 working full time for the Life Sciences Faculty Office. I had my daughter Jasmine in Dec 2010 and returned to work full time when she was 11 months. Like any first time mum I wanted to be around her and spend a lot of time with her but I couldn’t afford to give up work.

UCL is one of the best employers you can work for. I am allowed the flexibility to work from home when needed which works so well, actually enabling me to concentrate better on the complicated work tasks which a normal working day in the office wouldn’t. Our IT systems which enable me to work remotely are fantastic to help balance work and domestic responsibilities. My line manager and the colleagues in the office have been very supportive, throughout my pregnancy and now in my parenting days. It creates a positive working environment and I so look forward to continue working full time when I have a second one!”

Supneet Bajwa
Faculty Admissions Officer, Life Sciences
## What managers can do to support staff with dependents

- Where possible or practicable, be flexible – a flexible approach to staff is generally a more inclusive one, as it is more likely to meet the different needs of a team. Flexibility around working hours is a critical issue for working parents, especially during school holidays.
- Measure staff performance by means of objectives, rather than time at work – it is not only good management practice to measure staff by what they achieve, rather than the hours they spend at work, but it is also of particular benefit for those who are unable or unwilling to regularly work long hours.
- Avoid organising meetings and events outside core hours – routine team, departmental or faculty meetings should be avoided outside UCL’s ‘core hours’ of 10-12 and 2-4pm.
- Accept that staff will have fluctuating time and energy levels at different stages in their careers – be mindful of the impact of people’s lives outside work, where you are aware of this, and look to make realistic demands of them.
- Don’t assume they are less interested in their work. Just because, for example, a woman has recently returned from maternity leave and is excited about her family it doesn’t mean that she is any less interested in her work or ambitious about her career prospects. Managers should ensure that staff with dependents keep working on interesting and challenging projects and are provided with the same mentoring and career development opportunities.
- Make explicit efforts to include them in social and team building activities – evening social events in the pub aren’t suitable for everyone so make sure your team, division or department has a good mixture of social activities outside and during normal working hours. Some departments have annual social events, such as picnics, to which family members are invited to attend.

### Case Study 4 - Core work in core hours

“I’ve been a parent at UCL since my daughter was born extremely prematurely at 25 weeks in 2002. UCL was immediately generous in arranging extended sick and compassionate leave to enable me to attend my critically ill daughter’s bedside for the first three months of her life. After discharge from hospital she has grown to a healthy ten year old, joined by my now seven year old son. Throughout that time UCL has proven a flexible and supportive employer. My co-parenting has been facilitated by the scheduling of all meetings, including senior management at Faculty and School level, within core working hours. Innovative IT platforms allow effective on and off-site working in my role as a Deputy Head of Faculty while permitting the flexibility I need in my shared parenting role. The shared positive gender equality culture in my Institute facilitates those occasions when I need to be absent to care for my children and creates a positive atmosphere towards parenting that both supports my own needs and enables me to facilitate the needs of others.”

**Professor Geraint Rees**  
**Director, Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience**
Case Study 5 - Dual academic career parents

“I have been working in academia for well over 20 years, having had different positions at several European universities. At one of them I met my husband and now we both work at UCL. Working as a university lecturer is a tough job full of real responsibilities and very high expectations. Research is genuinely a continuous process occupying your mind far beyond "nine-to-five". However, it is portable - you can take it with you whilst waiting for your child to finish his tennis practice for example. It can also sometimes be paused whilst you go and pick up your child from school.

Our son is 7 years old. Somebody has to take him to school in the morning and pick him up from after-school club before it closes at 6pm. On days when we are both at UCL, my husband and I do "shifts". The one who picks him up from the after-school club leaves home very early in the morning in order to be back by 6pm, whilst the one who is taking him to school comes back late, but preferably in time for family dinner at 7pm. Early morning is time for homework, whilst 7-9pm is family time after which at least one of us is back at the computer working. We are lucky to be able to organise our shifts as my husband’s teaching is in the morning, whilst mine is in the afternoon.

Juggling demanding careers with parenthood simply must be possible regardless of how difficult it is. Being able to work flexible hours and from home, and most importantly being valued by our results and not hours spent in the office, is what makes it possible for us.”

Dr Ljiljana Marjanovic-Halburd
Senior Lecturer, The Bartlett School of Graduate Studies
& Professor Rod Halburd, Mathematics
Case Study 6 - Caring for older relatives

“My father died quite suddenly in October 2012. He had been caring for my mother Maisie who is relatively fit, despite being 93. Maisie has been able to stay in her own flat, in Cheltenham, with carers visiting daily, but is lonely and needs help with banking, shopping and so on. I was very grateful when my line manager John Tooke agreed that I could work my contracted hours Monday to Thursday to devote Fridays to visiting my mother and sometimes catching up on my own domestic chores.”

Professor Mary Collins
Dean of Life Sciences & UCL’s Gender Equality Champion

Case Study 7 - Part-time working

I joined UCL as a Research Assistant in 1991. I gained an MRC Fellowship in the same year that I became pregnant with my first child. With the support of my Head of Department I negotiated a return to work part-time (0.6FTE). I was able to balance my part-time working hours with continuing to build my research profile. One important aspect of this was departmental support of flexible working hours to accommodate travel to national and international conferences.

Whilst on extended maternity leave with my second child in 1999 I applied for a lectureship with full transparency of my intention to continue to work part-time. I was the only female candidate, and the only applicant wishing to work part-time. I was awarded the lectureship, taking up the post on continued part-time (0.6FTE) status. Course organisers and the Head of Department facilitated the necessary adjustments to the teaching timetable to accommodate a staggered return to work.

I was promoted to Senior Lecturer in 2005 and after discussion with the Head of Department and head of my research group I increased my hours to 0.8FTE. I continued to build a successful multidisciplinary research team investigating acute brain injury in adults, neurodevelopment in young infants and neurological consequences of cardiothoracic procedures. With departmental support, the help of a timely Female Promotion workshop, and the encouragement of senior female academics across the faculty, I was promoted to Professor in 2008. I continue to work part-time (0.8FTE), being absent from college on Fridays, but adopting a flexible working pattern as required.

Professor Clare Elwell
Medical Physics
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External Organisations

- **Netmums** is the UK’s fastest growing online parenting organisation
- **http://www.childcare.co.uk/** is a government website providing information on childcare
- **Www.carersuk.org** provide information and advice about caring alongside practical and emotional support for carers
- **https://www.gov.uk/parental-leave/overview** - guidance on parental leave
- **Day care trust** - national childcare charity. Campaigning work continues to focus on childcare affordability, listening to parents and keeping children at the centre.