

# Guidance Note

## Parental Leave Buddy System

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# Guidance Note

## Parental Leave Buddy System

### Background

Following a review and benchmarking exercise of the University's parental benefits a number of recommendations were presented and agreed to enhance our existing provision. This exercise formed part of the University's agenda as a socially progressive employer and the Parental Leave Buddy System reflects our continuing drive to ensure we remain an innovative and people-orientated employer, by offering additional support to staff before, during and after a period of parental leave.

The system involves the assigning of a buddy to any employee who is due to take an extended period of parental leave. This may be maternity, adoption, surrogacy or shared parental leave. The buddy would be a colleague of the employee as opposed to their manager who would act as less formal contact to update the employee on matters such as training opportunities, team developments or social events. The purpose of this system is to ensure that staff do not feel disconnected from the workplace whilst on leave and that they have an additional point of contact other than their line manager.

### Allocating a Buddy

Employees should suggest a colleague that they would feel comfortable with acting as a buddy and communicating with, as necessary, throughout their period of leave with their line manager. It may be appropriate that, where possible, the busy has recently returned from a period of leave themselves so that they can offer their own insights and experiences. It is then the responsibility of the line manager to discuss and agree this with the nominated colleague. If the colleague is not comfortable with the proposed arrangement they are not obligated to agree and an alternative colleague should be sought.

If the employee would prefer their line manager to act as the buddy throughout the leave period this should be agreed.

### Agreeing Communication During Leave

It is important that employees and their respective buddy agree the expectations prior to the start of the leave period. This should include the preferred form of communication, the messages to be communicated and the frequency of the communication.

The following questions and considerations may help when agreeing the desired approach to communication throughout the period of parental leave:

- Would the employee prefer to get contacted via email or mobile phone? If the preference is to contact them on their mobile should this be a phone call or via a message such as text or Whatsapp?
- Does the buddy have up to date, personal contact details for the employee?
- What would the employee like to receive information about? Do they wish to be invited to social events that take place in their absence or would they rather that communication focused on work related matters only?
- Would they be interested in receiving updates on training opportunities and if so what types of training would they like to be advised about?
- How often should communication take place? Is the employee comfortable to get this on an ad-hoc basis or would they prefer a regular update, for example, on a monthly basis.
- Is the employee expected to respond to the buddy or do both parties agree that this is not required?

It is important that both the employee and buddy are comfortable with the proposed arrangements. The allocation of a buddy is not to significantly increase the workload of colleagues and it is also important that employees on leave do not feel that are under pressure to be in regular communication with the

The line manager or Head of Department/School should continue to communicate directly with the employee on important/sensitive matters that they would normally communicate with all staff directly on and where it may not be appropriate that this information is conveyed through a third party. For example, in a restructuring situation or in matters related to the employees role or contract.

## **Keeping in Touch Days**

The line manager will continue to be responsible for authorising Keeping in Touch (KIT) Days. There is no obligation for employees to agree to work during their period of leave. However, these should continue to be agreed with the line manager directly. and the appropriate payment forms should be signed off by the line manager and/or Head of Department/School as opposed to the allocated buddy.