

UCD Managers Guide Supporting Employees who are Carers



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1. Introduction

It is important to UCD that employees who are caring for individuals who are in need of personal care or support due to the serious medical condition, illness, disability or frailty¹ are supported. This document is a practical framework for managers whose role is to lead diverse teams and support employees who are carers with the opportunity to thrive in their careers. UCD recognises that a supportive employer responds flexibly and can support employees who are caring to identify ways to balance work, their career and care. The intention of this framework is to highlight these supports and policies in one place for ease of access and provide guidance for managers.

Caring In Ireland

Between 2016 and 2022, the number of people providing regular unpaid care increased by over 50%, from 195,263 people in 2016 to 299,128 in 2022, in Ireland. A greater proportion of unpaid care was provided by females compared with males. In 2022, 61% (181,592) of carers were female and 39% (117,536) were male. People aged between 50 and 59 were the group most likely to be providing regular unpaid care in Ireland. There was a higher proportion of female carers between the ages 30 to 59 years (68%) than male carers (63%). The highest percentage of carers were aged 50 to 54 years (15%), followed by 14% in each of the 45 to 49 and 55 to 59 years age groups.² Employees in this age range can have dual caring responsibilities for children in addition.

UCD in partnership with Family Carers Ireland, are undertaking a four year research project, CAREWELL, to examine how family carers can be best supported to balance work with care.

“Family carers are the principal source of care for those in need of support due to a long-term illness, disability or frailty in the community³; it is estimated that this group saves the Irish economy about €20 billion through their unpaid duties.”⁴

With an ageing population, the demand for care is predicted to soon exceed supply. Consequently, the act of balancing work with care is gaining traction as an important health, social and economic issue.

A supportive work environment may be the remedy to some of the negative impacts often associated with caregiving, such as poor physical and psychological health, financial strain, and in extreme cases, withdrawal from the workforce. Provision needs to be made for carers in the workplace to facilitate enhanced outcomes in the spheres

¹ HSE Carer Definition <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/3/carerssupport/>

² Central Statistics Office, Health, Disability, Caring and Volunteering Statistics: [CSO Statistics 2022](#)

³ UCD CAREWELL: <https://carewellproject.com>

⁴ Family Carers Ireland calculated replacement cost based on average hours of care - €20bn per annum. The State of Caring Report 2022: <https://familycarers.ie/media/2545/family-carers-ireland-state-of-caring-2022.pdf>.

of their physical health, mental health, employment and work-life balance as a whole.⁵
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The outputs of this research, expected in 2024, will further support UCD to evolve this framework. The outputs of this research, expected in 2024, will further support UCD to evolve this framework. The UCD Gender Equality Action Plan 2024-2028 will support the further development and roll out of this framework.

2. Overview UCD Carer Friendly Flexible Working Options and Leave Policies

Carer Friendly Policies⁷ are policies that make it possible for employees to balance caring responsibilities and work more easily and fulfil both obligations. Flexible working options and leave arrangements are noted below.

UCD Flexible Working Options for Carers	UCD Leave Options for Carers
Core Meeting Hours	Force Majeure (paid leave) and UCD
Hybrid Working (Pilot)	Leave for Medical Care Purposes (unpaid leave)
Job Sharing	Carers Leave (unpaid leave)
Phased Return to Teaching for Academics who are carers. UCD Support for Family Related Leave Policy and Guidelines.	
Shorter Working Year	
Career Break	
<p>Note: Further flexible working policies are under development based on the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023 in line with the Code of Practice published by the Workplace Relations Commission in 2024. These flexible options can be agreed locally such as, part-time working options for example, in the meantime. Please speak to your HR Partner if you require further information.</p>	

⁵ UCD Carewell: <https://carewellproject.com>

⁶ Spann, Alice, Challenges of combining work and unpaid care, and solutions: A scoping review, 2020. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/hsc.12912>.

⁷Please refer to the relevant policies for full information in relation to eligibility and accessing supports as each policy remains the official document.

A quick overview of UCD flexible working and leave options are detailed in the next section. Further information can be found on HR Policies A-Z. Please consult the UCD Governance Library for the most recent information on policies.

3. Flexible Working Options for Carers at UCD

3.1 UCD Hybrid Working Pilot

UCD currently has a hybrid working trial in place which is under review. A new hybrid working policy will be considered and approved by UMT in 2024.

3.2 UCD Job Share Policy

Job sharing is a way two people voluntarily share the duties of one post between them. Each job-sharer receives a pro-rata salary and terms and conditions for the time worked. Many people have responsibilities which make life/work balance difficult sometimes at particular periods of their working lives. UCD recognises that people in these circumstances should be able to continue their career and will welcome the opportunity to use their skills and experience on a part-time basis.

3.3 UCD Core Meeting Hours Policy

This policy aims to facilitate the embedding of core meeting hours across the University, as part of a range of actions to support a family-friendly working environment. Core meeting hours are defined as the hours between 9:30am and 4:00pm, Monday to Friday. They do not represent the working day, but rather are a subset of the working day. Meetings include all University, College and School level meetings, seminars, workshops etc. which employees are either required or invited to attend. They do not include timetabled teaching or assessment.

3.4 UCD Shorter Working Year Policy

The Shorter Working Year scheme enables employees to take unpaid leave of up to 13 weeks with the possibility of spreading the reduced salary over a 12-month period

3.5 UCD Support for Family Related Leave Policy

Academics who are returning from maternity, adoptive, or carers leave (24 weeks or more), are entitled to 50% teaching buy-out over two semesters on return from leave to re-establish their research career. As a research-intensive university, UCD is committed to support those returning from maternity, adoptive/surrogacy and carers leave. All Staff are

entitled to an upskilling grant on return from maternity, adoptive, or carers leave of 24 weeks or more.

3.6 UCD Career Break Policy

A career break is a period of unpaid leave with a maximum duration of 5 years.

There are two types of Career Break, each with specific conditions:

- **Career break up to maximum of 1 year:** At the end of this period you will return to your substantive post with UCD.
- **Career break over 1 year up to maximum of 5 years:** At the end of this period you may apply to return to UCD and will be offered the first vacancy at the grade you previously held, which arises in the School/Unit in which you worked. The university will not be able to guarantee a position for a career break over 1 year.

3.7 Research Sabbatical

Research Sabbatical Leave aims to support the University's strategy by increasing the quality, quantity and impact of research, scholarship and innovation. Leave is granted for a specified period not exceeding twelve months at any one time.

4. Leave for Carers at UCD

4.1 Force Majeure

An employee is entitled to leave with pay for urgent family reasons, for example, an injury or illness of a prescribed person where the immediate presence of the employee at the place where the person is, whether at their home or elsewhere, is indispensable.

Duration of Leave: Employees are entitled to up to 3 days in any period of 12 consecutive months or 5 days in any period of 36 consecutive months.

Force Majeure leave only relates to a situation which is not foreseeable or otherwise not generally predictable. Routine minor and predictable illnesses to children or other family members which invariably occur are not covered.

Prescribed Persons:

- a) a person of whom the employee is the relevant parent or acting in loco parentis,
- b) a spouse, civil partner, or cohabitant of the employee,
- c) a brother, sister, sibling,
- d) a parent or grandparent
- e) a person who resides with the employee in a relationship of domestic dependency

4.2 Medical Care Leave

Medical Care leave provides short term unpaid leave from work to provide personal care or support to a prescribed person that needs significant care or support for a serious medical reason. Medical Care leave can be used in a flexible way for parents or carers that need time off from work in situations that can be unpredictable or in some cases pre-planned. UCD defines a serious medical reason as a disability, illness or injury that requires an employee to provide care or support to a prescribed person either at home or in a healthcare setting.

Duration of Leave: The entitlement to Medical Care leave extends to 5 working days in any period of 12 consecutive months. The minimum leave taken at a time is 1 day. Half or part days are counted as 1 full day in terms of total entitlement.

Prescribed person (as described in the Work Life Balance Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 2023) Medical Care leave is granted to one of the following prescribed persons.

- (a) a person of whom the employee is the relevant parent or acting in loco parentis,
- (b) the spouse, civil partner or cohabitant of the employee,
- (c) a parent or grandparent of the employee,
- (d) a brother, sister or sibling of the employee,
- (e) a person other than one specified in any of paragraphs (a) to (d), who lives in the same household as the employee and is in need of significant care or support for serious medical reasons.

4.3 Carer's Leave Policy

Provides for the temporary absence from employment of employees for the purpose of the provision of full-time care and attention to a person requiring it, while protecting the employee's employment rights. Carer's Leave is unpaid but your role is kept open for when you return. If you have enough PRSI contributions, you can apply for Carer's Benefit. If you do not have enough PRSI contributions, you can apply for a means-tested Carer's Allowance.

Duration of Leave: The minimum period of leave is 13 weeks and the maximum period is 104 weeks. If an employee requires less than 13-weeks, this can be provided to an employee in agreement with the employee's manager.

Carer's leave can be taken as a continuous block of 104 weeks for each prescribed person, or, by agreement with the employer, shorter periods adding up to 104 weeks. If the leave is broken up there must be at least six weeks between the leave periods.

Working during Carer's Leave:

The employee can work or attend an educational or training course or do voluntary work for up to 18.5 hours a week in employment or self-employment while they are on carer's leave, as long as they earn less than €350 a week. From June 2024, the income disregard for Carer's Allowance will increase to €450 for a single person and €900 for a couple. (This is their take-home pay after deductions such as tax, PRSI and union dues.) (This is their take-home pay after deductions such as tax, PRSI and union dues.) Before commencing work or training, it must be approved by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. (This is their

take-home pay after deductions such as tax, PRSI and union dues.) Before commencing work or training, it must be approved by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs.

4.4 UCD Employees Returning from Carers Leave

Faculty: are entitled to a phased increase in teaching activity over the course of the first calendar year following their return, typically averaging 50% commitment over that year if they are on Carer's Leave for 24 weeks or more as per the Support for Family Related Leave Policy and Guidelines.

All employees: are entitled to a €500 upskilling and networking grant if they are on Carer's Leave for 24 weeks or more as per the Support for Family Related Leave Policy.

5. Guidance for Managers

It can be a great time of upheaval and worry when a family member or prescribed person is unwell, under medical care or in need of significant care due to illness, frailty, or disability. Creating a culture of trust, flexibility and inclusion where carers feel valued and supported can improve work-life balance and well-being, as it facilitates employees to manage their own time flexibly. It is important that managers maintain a culture of support and caring underpinned by a flexible working culture.

Lines of communication should ideally continue whilst the employee is on leave (as per the employee's wishes) and after they return. Good communication with the employee throughout this period will make the employee feel valued and supported and more likely that they will return to work. This will also support you, as a manager with planning. The following are guidelines around the types of conversations that should take place before and during leave.

People managers can support employees balancing work and caring responsibilities by:

- Being compassionate to employees who are balancing caring responsibilities and work, availing of leave, or providing occasional care to a prescribed person.
- Establishing a flexible work culture, as far as is operationally possible. Carers have diverse circumstances, and may request flexible work arrangements to facilitate them to continue to work and provide care. Managers should be flexible and consider this if it is operationally possible.
- Maintaining regular communication with the employee to understand what measures would support them to balance workload and caring responsibilities or to avail of the relevant leave options for carers.

- Identifying supports for employees who are carers before, during, and returning from Carer's Leave to re-establish their career and to reach their full potential including a reduced teaching load for one semester for faculty.
- Providing continuity, where feasible, to employees returning from Carer's Leave with regard to their workspace, projects, option to reclaim teaching modules if operationally feasible, when returning from Carer's Leave.
- Full information is available via **UCD Support for Family Related Leave Policy and Guidelines**. These guidelines provide supports for before, during and returning from leave and should be read in conjunction with this guide which supports carers balancing work and care.

Balancing Career Planning and Development

Managers should be aware of their obligations under the legislation and take steps to ensure employees can experience a level playing field in UCD for achieving their goals and accessing career opportunities, ensuring they are not disadvantaged as a result of caring commitments.

- Adopt a flexible approach where feasible, support employees through P4G and conversations that support career planning.
- Ensuring carers are given equal access and encouragement to career development, training and promotion opportunities.
- Faculty Promotions: Line managers and P4G reviewers alike should ensure that academic staff are aware that consideration is given to any personal, caring or non-academic circumstances that are brought to the attention of the Committee, which may have impacted on performance and candidates are strongly encouraged to provide this information in their application. The Faculty Promotions Committee takes into account the impact that such circumstances can have on the quantity of the outputs of a candidate under the criteria for promotion but expects the same standard in terms of the quality of the outputs.
- Promoting equality of opportunity for all employees and foster a culture where all employees, including carers, can reach their full potential.

Employee Well-Being

- Maintain regular check-ins with the employee not just on work activities. It is important to ask how team members are coping.
- Promoting a culture of self-care for employee mental health and well-being. This is critical for carers' mental health and well-being and for the well-being of those they care for.
- Sign-post to relevant supports outlined in this document.

6. Top tips: Getting the best from your conversation

Responding to an employee who requires supports

- Be empathetic and understanding in your communication style.
 - It can be a great time of upheaval and worry when a family member or prescribed person is unwell, under medical care or in need of significant care due to illness, frailty, or disability.
 - Employees may be caring for more than one individual and/or may be juggling parenting responsibilities.
 - Recognise that disclosure can be difficult for employees
- Listen to the employee and reassure the employee that you will work together to develop a plan to support them.
- Let the employee know if you need time to review the range of supports that might assist the employee.
- Agree on a time to meet during this discussion.
- Respect the confidentiality of employees who disclose that they are carers.

Preparing for the meeting

Review this guide in conjunction with UCD policies and flexible working options.

- An overview of policies and flexible working options and support for employees are available in this document.
- Talk to your HR Partner about how this might be approached.
- You could ask your HR Partner to check across HR Partner Services for examples of how managers have supported employees to date in UCD.
- It is essential for managers and employees to have an open conversation, discuss support needs and to make a tailored plan.
- Managers should foster good communication with employees from the outset and throughout this period.
- Consider what local arrangements can be implemented where operationally feasible.
- You are encouraged to be flexible as sometimes requests will come in for flexibility at short notice e.g. Force Majeure Leave or Medical Care Leave. This will support the employee in the event of required flexibility or other instances where leave may be required and will support the return to work.
- It is also important for managers to be aware of University supports available, and give consideration as to how employees can take care of their emotional and physical well-being while balancing work demands and caring.

Book a Meeting

Schedule the meeting at a time and in a private place where you will not be interrupted by anyone else.

Make a plan

Reassure the employee that you both can come up with an action plan. Discuss the types of flexibility or leave required by the employee.

Discuss supports available

- Flexible working options
- Leave options
- Employee Supports
- Employee Well-Being

Confidentiality

- Establish the level of confidentiality with your employee.
- Managers should clarify with the employee who knows about the caring responsibilities and who the employee is happy to know.
- Agree if other employees should/are required to be informed of the adjustments and by who.

Agreeing actions

- Agree actions and how to implement them including setting time to review how the arrangement is working in practice once implemented (and follow this up in writing e.g. by email).
- Encourage the employee to let you know if they require any tweaks to the agreed adjustments.
- Agree a timeline for a check-in.

Follow Up

Check-in with the employee: this is an on-going conversation.

This is really important, as a care recipients' needs may change over time. It may be that you need to meet with the employee to adapt the adjustments if this happens.

It is important to check-in on their well-being and how they are coping.

7. Supports for Employees

In this section you will find internal and external resources to support you balance work and caring responsibilities.

Our University provides a wide range of sources of support and information for employees:

- UCD Support for Carers EDI webpage:
- Advice on all aspects of policies and policy related documents and forms through Human Resources ext. [4900](tel:4900) or by emailing HRHelpdesk@ucd.ie
- Information and support from the line manager
- UCD HR Partners
- Confidential 24-hour service through the Employee Assistance Service (EAS): www.ucd.ie/engage/employeerelations/employeeassistanceservice/
- UCD Mental Health First Aid Panel
- UCD People and Organisation Development - online learning
- UCD Carewell Project: <https://carewellproject.com/>

External Supports

- Family Carers Ireland
Freephone Careline – 1800 24 07 24 available Monday to Friday 9am – 8.00pm and Saturday 10.00am – 12 noon.
- HSE Carers Support
- Citizens Information

Legislation and Policies

- UCD Force Majeure and Medical Care Leave Policy
- UCD Carer's Leave Policy
- UCD Support for Family Related Leave Policy and Guidelines
- Core Meeting Hours Policy
- Job Sharing
- Shorter Working Year Policy
- Bereavement Policy
- UCD Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Carer's Leave Act 2001

All policies and policy related documents and forms are subject to amendment.

Please refer to the UCD Governance Document Library website for the official, most recent version.

The University wants to ensure that it continues to provide the best supports that it can to employees who are carers and to people managers supporting employees. For this reason these documents are iterative. If you have suggestions around other supports that may be of assistance or raising awareness around this topic please contact edi@ucd.ie

