



**Maynooth University  
Human Resources**

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# **Athena Swan Maternity Supports**

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Date: May 2022

# Guide to Athena Swan Maternity Supports

## Purpose

The purpose of this document is to set out the supports available to employees returning from maternity leave under the Athena Swan initiative.

This document also clarifies the practical implementation of these supports as they relate to employees, Heads of Department and Line Managers.

## Background

In recognising the challenges staff may face when returning to work from maternity or adoptive leave, the University is committed to providing supports for all staff to assist with re-integration into their position following the break from work.

In 2018 Maynooth University was awarded an Athena SWAN Bronze award in recognition of its commitment to advancing gender equality. A cornerstone of the application was the Maynooth University Gender Equality Action Plan 2017-2021. The Action Plan proposed to centrally fund and facilitate a protected three-month teaching-free period for academic staff returning to work after a period of maternity/adoptive leave.

Support is also available to staff without teaching responsibilities in the form of a pre and post maternity leave handover period.

## About the Athena Swan supports

### 1. What is the Athena Swan 'Teaching Free' / Research exclusive period and extended handover period?

**Academic staff** with both teaching and research responsibilities may apply to their Head of Department for a research exclusive period following their maternity or adoptive leave. This research exclusive period allows the academic staff member the opportunity to focus on development of their research profile. This research exclusive period will be supported by the University through the extension of cover arrangements where the academic staff member's return to work falls within a teaching period.

The objective of this initiative is to provide a teaching free period for academic staff returning from maternity/adoptive leave to assist with re-integration back into their role, and also to provide academic staff who avail of such leave the opportunity to develop in their careers. The initiative is intended to be supportive for both the staff member and also their department.

**Staff without teaching responsibilities** who will have their role covered during their maternity leave may avail of 4 weeks 'handover' period, taken in 2-week blocks before and after the maternity/adoptive leave. This extra period will allow for the gradual handover of work, projects, and a catch up of administration and communication. Employees intending to avail of the handover period should confirm uptake of this support in advance of their availing of maternity/adoptive leave to allow for the necessary cover to be put in place.

## 2. How does the 'Teaching Free' / Research exclusive period and extended handover period work?

The arrangements applicable to the 'Teaching Free' / Research exclusive period are:

- The employee must be returning to the academic role immediately following a period of maternity or adoptive leave (either following the initial paid period up to 26 weeks, or the added unpaid period of 16 weeks);
- The expected date of return must be during an identified teaching period;
- The teaching free/ research exclusive period, availed of in one single block, will be covered for a maximum of 3 months, or until teaching term finishes.

Staff **without teaching responsibilities** whose role is covered may avail of 4 weeks 'handover' period, taken in 2-week blocks before and after the maternity/adoptive leave.

## 3. How do employee's avail of these additional supports?

In respect of the 'Teaching Free' / Research exclusive period, the employee will need to confirm uptake of this research opportunity, with their Head of Department, **at least 6 weeks before the end** of the maternity/ adoptive leave period (paid or unpaid) to allow sufficient time for teaching cover to be put in place, where necessary.

This can be included on the Maternity Leave application form at the time of submission, or by notification to Head of Department and Human Resources at a later date, in writing, and allowing sufficient time for cover arrangements to be put in place.

Where notified in advance of the maternity leave, this additional time can be included on the Post Requisition Form at the time of submission for approval of replacement cover.

***Staff without teaching responsibilities*** who intend to avail of the handover period should **confirm uptake of this support in advance** of availing of their maternity/adoptive leave to allow for the necessary cover to be put in place. This additional time can be included on the Post Requisition Form at the time of submission for approval of replacement cover.

## 4. Are staff paid during this period?

Employee's will continue to be paid their salary once they have returned to work from the period of maternity/adoptive leave (paid and unpaid leave).

Replacement cover for maternity leave/adoptive leave and the extended period upon return (within teaching time) is core funded.

## 5. Are there specific pieces of research work that must be undertaken?

The specific arrangements and proposals relating to the research to be undertaken should be discussed and agreed between the academic staff member and their Head of Department.

Useful links:

- <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/human-resources/policies/maternity-leave>
- <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/edi>