SAGE Cygnet Award Application: Parental Leave

Institution: University of Southern Queensland
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Glossary

Abbreviation	Term
ASBA	Athena Swan Bronze Award
EA	Enterprise Agreement
HR	Human resources
KIT	Keeping in Touch (day/s)
STEMM	Science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine
UniSQ	University of Southern Queensland

University of Southern Queensland: SAGE Cygnet #4

Barrier Type	Current Cygnet	Barrier
Institution-wide barrier	✓	Parental leave
Sub-group barrier		
Institution-wide/Sub-group barrier		
Institution-wide/Sub-group barrier		

A note on data

Some of the University's broader data collection systems currently collect gender for the categories 'F, M, and X'. As such, this Cygnet Award submission uses these data categories. Where no data has been collected from non-binary or other gender participants (due to participants not identifying a non-binary gender, or system limitations), X is omitted from the data. The terms 'women' and 'men' have primarily been used throughout the narrative rather than 'female' and 'male' in recognition of the gender spectrum, but 'F, M and X' is maintained in tables and graphs to ensure consistency with our systems and previous Cygnet submissions.

Key barrier

Based on evidence from the 2017-2019 Athena Swan Bronze Award (ASBA) self-assessment and 2022 staff experience evaluation, the University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ) identified the staff parental leave experience as a key focus area for improvement. Evidence indicated that while parental leave uptake at the University has historically been balanced between the genders, women take the majority of parental and primary caregiver's leave, while men take the majority of partner leave. Culture and staff awareness of entitlements contribute to these trends, and equate both to women encountering more breaks and barriers to their career progression, and men encountering barriers to taking on more of the early parenting duties than is currently typical.

Evaluation also found that there was inconsistent information and support for staff leading up to, during, and after returning from leave, highlighting an opportunity to improve resources and support to reduce the various career impacts that taking parental leave can have for any employee.

Evidence of barrier

Parental leave uptake

Over 2019-2021 (during a portion of the University's ASBA self-assessment period and before parental leave improvements were implemented), parental leave uptake was similar for women (2.6% of all female staff took parental leave) and men (2.5% of all male staff took parental leave) (Table 2; Chart 1). Female professional staff were the most likely to take parental leave (3.2%), with male professional staff not far behind (2.8%). Parental leave rates for science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine (STEMM) academics were similar between genders (women 2.1%; men 2.5%). The highest discrepancy between genders was for non-STEMM academics (0.7% of women took parental leave compared to 1.9% of men).

		2019		2020		2021	
		F HC	M HC	F HC	M HC	F HC	M HC
Academic	STEMM	150	216	168	219	160	217
	Non-STEMM	181	137	180	139	180	137
Professional		743	395	707	383	740	405
Total		1,074	748	1,055	741	1,080	759
Annual total		1,822		1,796		1,839	

Table 1: University staff distribution by gender and staff type 2019-2021.

Note: HC = Head count.

		2019				2020				2021			
		F		M		F		M		F		M	
		HC	%	HC	%	HC	%	HC	%	HC	%	HC	%
Academic	STEMM	3	2%	1	0.5%	3	1.8%	9	4.1%	4	2.5%	6	2.8%
Academic	Non-STEMM	0	0%	4	2.9%	2	1.1%	4	2.9%	2	1.1%	0	0%
Professional		31	4.2%	9	2.3%	22	3.1%	11	2.9%	18	2.4%	13	3.2%
	Total	34	3.2%	14	1.9%	27	2.6%	24	3.2%	24	2.2%	19	2.5%
	Annual total	48 / 2.6%				51 / 2.8%				43 / 2.3%			

2019-2021 F totals	Academic STEMM: HC 10 / 2.1%	Academic non-STEMM: HC 4 / 0.7%	Professional: HC 71 / 3.2%	All staff types: HC 85 / 2.6%
2019-2021 M totals	Academic STEMM: HC 16 / 2.5%	Academic non-STEMM: HC 8 / 1.9%	Professional: HC 33 / 2.8%	All staff types: HC 57 / 2.5%

Table 2: Parental leave uptake by gender and staff type 2019-2021.

Note: HC = Head count. % = % of cohort who took parental leave in that time period.

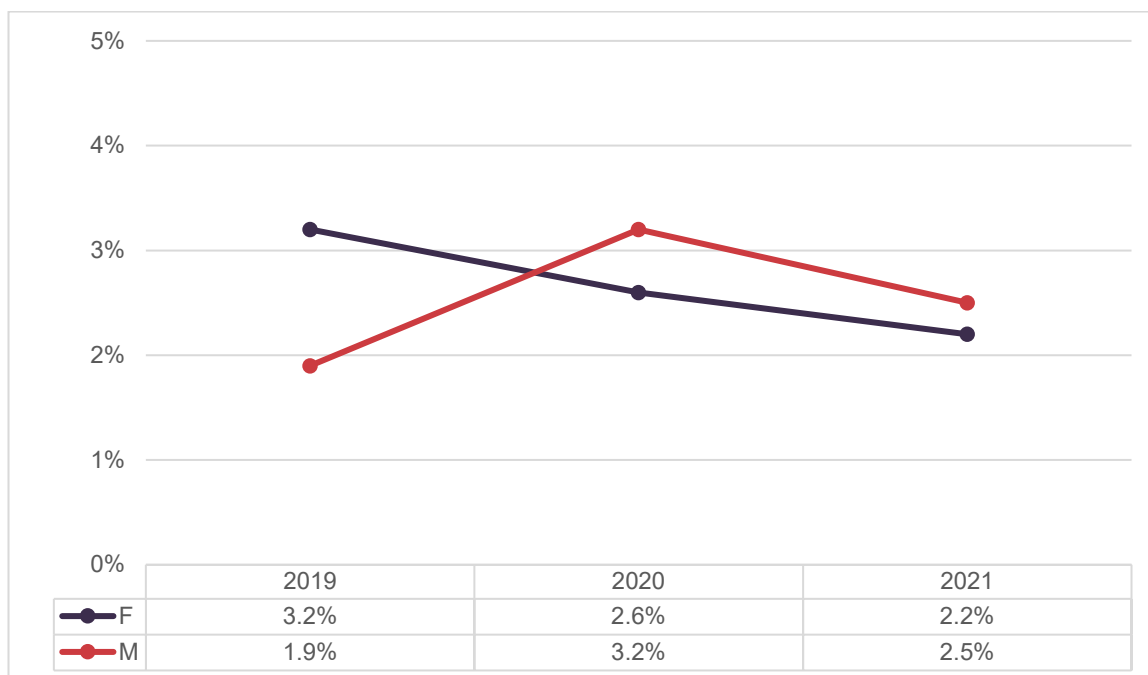|	2019	2020	2021
F	3.2%	2.6%	2.2%
M	1.9%	3.2%	2.5%

Chart 1: Parental leave uptake by gender as a percentage of same cohort 2019-2021.

Where parental leave differences primarily arose were in the leave type taken; over 2019-2021, 100% of those who took partner leave were men, whereas women made up 87% of those who took parental and/or primary caregiver's leave with men making up the other 13% (Table 3; Chart 2). While the culture that influences women to take on primary caregiver roles and men to take on partner roles in raising children exists on a much broader scale than just at UniSQ, this leave type discrepancy suggests a lack of a supportive workplace culture and staff awareness regarding available parental leave entitlements

and supports. As participants shared in focus groups during UniSQ's ASBA self-assessment, "It's confusing to know what leave an employee is entitled to with respect to parental leave" (female non-STEMM supervisor), and "I didn't know I was entitled to take primary caregiver's leave" (male STEMM employee).

	2019				2020				2021			
	F		M		F		M		F		M	
	HC	%	HC	%	HC	%	HC	%	HC	%	HC	%
Parental and/or PCG Leave	34	71%	3	6%	27	53%	4	8.3%	24	56%	6	14%
Partner Leave	0	0%	11	23%	0	0%	20	39%	0	0%	13	30%
Total	34	71%	14	29%	27	53%	24	47%	24	56%	19	44%

2019-2021 F totals	Parental and/or PCG Leave: HC 85 / 87%	Partner Leave: HC 0 / 0%
2019-2021 M totals	Parental and/or PCG Leave: HC 13 / 13%	Partner Leave: HC 44 / 100%

Table 3: Parental leave by gender and leave type 2019-2021.

Note: HC = Head count. % = % of all employees who took parental leave in the same time period.
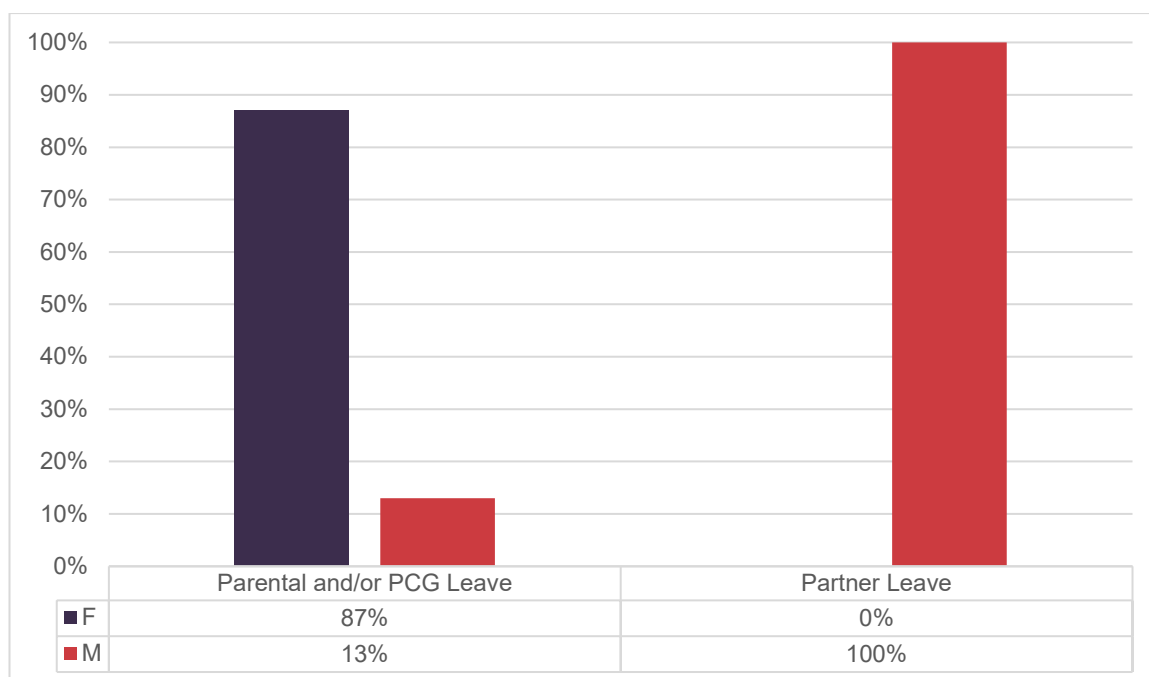

	Parental and/or PCG Leave	Partner Leave
F	87%	0%
M	13%	100%

Chart 2: Parental leave by gender and leave type 2019-2021.

Keeping in Touch days uptake

Employees are eligible to access up to 10 paid Keeping in Touch (KIT) days during their parental leave period. KIT days can be used to refresh skills, participate in workplace planning, or engage with other

professional development activities, which supports individuals to stay up to date with their workplace and assists with their return to work. Evaluation of parental leave through both the ASBA self-assessment and interviews conducted in 2022 highlighted that few employees or supervisors had knowledge of KIT days or how to implement them. Due to this lack of awareness, KIT days have been an underutilised resource in preparing and supporting staff to return to work; over 2019-2021, only two female staff members took any KIT days (Table 4).

	2019	2020	2021	Total
F HC	0	1	1	2
M HC	0	0	0	0
Total	0	1	1	2

Table 4: KIT days uptake by gender 2019-2021.

Note: HC = Head count.

Employee experience

Broad engagement and consultation with all University staff during the ASBA self-assessment highlighted several concerns regarding parental leave. Staff feedback via focus groups, workshops and forums indicated there was widespread lack of understanding of the parental leave entitlements available. Feedback and evaluation also highlighted:

- Some staff felt undervalued when their positions were not backfilled and were concerned about job security when they returned from leave.
- Some academics reported their workload, at times, was pushed onto colleagues, making them feel pressured to return from leave early.
- Some staff felt there were specific departmental cultures that did not support flexible work for men who wanted to be at home with their children more.
- Not all parenting facilities are in areas that staff can easily access or do not contain private feeding areas.

To better understand recent employee parental leave experiences, in 2022 the University undertook evaluation with staff who had returned from parental leave within the previous year. Fourteen staff members participated in one-on-one interviews, though there was low uptake from male participants despite efforts to engage this cohort (Table 5).

		F HC	M HC	Total
Academic	**STEMM**	3	2	5
	Non-STEMM	0	0	0
Professional		9	0	9
	Total	12	2	14

Table 5: Demographics of 2022 parental leave evaluation participants.

Note: HC = Head count.

Broadly, participant feedback indicated (Table 6):

- Engagement with the People Portfolio was how most people sought information about parental leave, but online resources were sparse and the leave application process confusing.
- Men need greater support to understand and utilise their parental leave entitlements.
- Role backfilling expectations were not often met.
- While most were happy with return-to-work arrangements, handovers were not always well-managed, and some were concerned about lack of progression when returning on reduced fractional hours.
- Support to breast/chestfeed or express milk on-campus could be improved.

Feedback on parental leave preparation
Participants reported using a combination of methods to understand their parental leave entitlements. 100% engaged with the University's human resources department directly (the People Portfolio), while approximately one-third first engaged with their supervisor or relevant policies and procedures. A small number of participants reported receiving incorrect or confusing advice regarding their entitlements, while the remainder indicated that the support to understand their entitlements and map out their leave plan was thorough. 50% of participants indicated that the online processes of applying for leave were onerous and could be more user-friendly.
Most participants indicated that flexibility to attend appointments or adjust working arrangements in the lead-up to taking leave was able to be negotiated with their supervisor and team, and that they were happy with these arrangements. A small number of employees highlighted that the ability to work from home should be made available as part of the University's parental leave offerings, rather than coordinated locally.
Participants were encouraged to make suggestions for how UniSQ could best support employees to prepare for parental leave. The suggestions included: - The ability for employees to use special leave in instances such as miscarriage and prenatal depression. - For the People Portfolio to offer employees access to more online resources regarding parental leave entitlements and available support.

• Two academic employees suggested that UniSQ should provide more leave for fathers and partners, as well as clearer information and support for fathers and partners to utilise parental leave entitlements to encourage a shift in workplace culture.

Feedback on parental leave period
Approximately half of participants reported having contact with their team/colleagues and/or their supervisor (majority of supervisors were women) during their parental leave period. Approximately a third reported having no or very little contact with UniSQ at all.
Approximately a third reported using KIT days during their leave, and of those who did not, 50% reported they had either never heard of them or had heard of them but were unsure about how to access them or what support they could offer.

Feedback on return to work
Over half of participants indicated that they returned to work following leave on a reduced fractional arrangement, and over a third indicated that the capacity to work from home and flexibility around working times, supported them to return to work while juggling new family commitments and responsibilities.
Most participants were happy with their return-to-work arrangements. One academic woman in STEMM noted that her fractional arrangement precluded her from returning to the leadership role she held prior to taking leave, and she worried this would delay her opportunity for promotion. She recommended making leadership opportunities more flexible to improve accessibility for employees on fractional arrangements.
Approximately half of those interviewed did not require the use of breast/chestfeeding facilities at UniSQ, due to having stopped breast/chestfeeding prior to returning to work or other reasons not disclosed. Of the four mothers who required the use of breast/chestfeeding facilities to express, all utilised their own or a nearby vacant office. While all were comfortable with this, the lack of provision of a private fridge and microwave for storing and heating milk was a problem. This led them to use the communal kitchen microwaves and fridges, which lacked privacy and space, and in some cases, employees decided to stop breast/chestfeeding altogether to avoid having to express at work.
In most cases, employees' expectations of their role being backfilled while they were on leave differed from arrangements that were put in place. Feedback also indicated handovers were poorly managed on their return to work.

Table 6: Qualitative analysis of 2022 parental leave evaluation.

Interview participants were also asked to rate their satisfaction with parental leave on a scale of 1-5 where 1 = very dissatisfied and 5 = very satisfied. Overall, respondents gave an average 4.3 score for satisfaction with support from UniSQ to prepare and apply for parental leave; an average 3.4 score for satisfaction with support from UniSQ during leave; and an average 4 score for satisfaction with return-to-work arrangements (Tables 7, 8, and 9). Academic STEMM women (n = 3) tended to score the lowest and academic STEMM men (n = 1) the highest (though note the low participant numbers for these cohorts and lack of representation for non-STEMM male academics and male professional staff).

		"How satisfied were you with the support from UniSQ to prepare and apply for parental leave?"		
		F av. satisfaction	M av. satisfaction	Av. satisfaction rating
Academic	STEMM	3.5	4.5	4.2
	Non-STEMM	-	-	-
Professional		4.3	-	4.3
Av. satisfaction rating		4.2	4.5	4.3

Table 7: Staff satisfaction with support from UniSQ to prepare and apply for parental leave.

		"How satisfied were you with the support from UniSQ during your parental leave?"		
		F av. satisfaction	M av. satisfaction	Av. satisfaction rating
Academic	STEMM	2.5	4.5	3.9
	Non-STEMM	-	-	-
Professional		3.3	-	3.3
Av. satisfaction rating		3.2	4.5	3.4

Table 8: Staff satisfaction with support from UniSQ during parental leave.

		"How satisfied were you with your return-to-work experience?"		
		F av. satisfaction	M av. satisfaction	Av. satisfaction rating
Academic	STEMM	4	5	4.7
	Non-STEMM	-	-	-
Professional		3.8	-	3.8
Av. satisfaction rating		3.8	5	4

Table 9: Staff satisfaction with return-to-work arrangements.

Actions and outputs

In response to the feedback gathered about inadequacies or areas for improvement regarding parental leave, UniSQ's SAGE team collaborated closely with the People Portfolio (the University's human resources [HR] department) to focus efforts in 2022 on improving the parental leave experience at the University. Resourcing and budgetary constraints impacted capacity to carry out all actions identified in the original SAGE Bronze Award Action Plan; however a range of robust improvements were successfully implemented, as outlined below.

Parental leave entitlements

Enterprise Agreement

As part of the University's Enterprise Agreement (EA) 2023-2026 bargaining process, which took place over 2021 and 2022, the University's SAGE program team provided feedback and advocated for staff on the topics of surrogacy, foster case, adoption, miscarriage and stillbirth, return to work, gender terminology, and more. Several significant changes were reflected in the EA 2023-2026 (Table 10):

- The primary caregiver is entitled to up to 26 weeks' paid leave (rather than the previous 12).
- In line with the above, the partner of the birth or adoptive parent is entitled to up to 26 weeks' (rather than the previous 14 weeks') paid leave if they are the primary caregiver. This provides more incentive for partners (who are primarily men according to UniSQ data) to take longer periods of parental leave.
- The previous EA indicated that any pregnancy terminating before the expected date of birth, or child death within 12 months of birth or placement, would entitle employees to leave in accordance with University policies and procedures, and paid special leave. In the case of stillbirth, miscarriage, or infant death before two years old, this leave is now detailed and protected in the EA 2023-2026, stipulating that employees eligible for parental leave are entitled to up to six weeks' paid special parental leave and up to 12 months' unpaid parental leave.
- Language has been updated to refer to birth or adoptive parent and partner leave, rather than maternity and paternity leave, to encourage a more inclusive, non-heteronormative and non-cisgendered understanding and culture around parenting.

Leave type	Enterprise Agreement	Eligibility (months of continuous service)	Leave entitlement
Birth or adoptive parent	2018-2021	12	12 months' leave including 14 weeks' paid leave (+ additional 12 weeks' paid leave if the primary caregiver)
	2023-2026		
Primary caregiver	2018-2021	12 Must also be primary caregiver of the child	Six weeks' paid leave taken within 26 weeks of birth (+ additional six weeks' paid leave until child's second birthday)
	2023-2026		26 total weeks' paid leave whether birth or adoptive parent, or partner
Partner	2018-2021	12	12 months' leave including 2 weeks' paid leave (+ additional 12 weeks' paid leave if the primary caregiver)

	2023-2026		12 months' leave including 2 weeks' paid leave (or total 26 weeks' paid leave if the primary caregiver)
All	2018-2021	>12	26 weeks' unpaid leave
	2023-2026		

Table 10: Parental leave entitlements comparison of Enterprise Agreements 2018-2021 and 2023-2026.

Note: The Enterprise Agreement 2018-2021 encompassed 2022 while agreement bargaining was ongoing.

Parental leave policies and procedures

To complement the rollout of the new EA 2023-2026, the University reviewed the existing Parental Leave Schedule and Breastfeeding Procedure, and updated, streamlined and combined these into the single Parental Leave Procedure. This process included providing clear guidance on entitlements and application processes, KIT days, return-to-work flexibility, and breast/chestfeeding and milk expressing facilities and supports.

Parental leave resources

Online parental leave hub

To combat the lack of accessible information and awareness regarding parental leave entitlements, the University developed an online parental leave hub accessible to all staff. The hub is organised into two resource areas - one for employees and one for supervisors - and provides clear, accessible information across the three categories of *preparing for parental leave*, *during leave*, and *returning from leave*. The hub explains entitlements and connects employees with key internal and external resources to support parental leave (Table 11).

Internal resources	External resources
Employee Assistance Program	Australian Parenting Network
Enterprise Agreement 2023-2026	CareforKids
Leave calculation tool	Fair Work Ombudsman
Parental leave communication plan template	Families Australia
UniSQ online hubs: • Flexible working • Wellbeing	Keeping in Touch days
	Parentline | Phone counselling service
UniSQ policies and procedures: • Flexible Working Arrangements Procedure • Leave of Absence Procedure • Parental Leave Procedure	Services Australia
	Starting blocks | Childcare finder
	Your Healthy Pregnancy

Table 11: Key resources available via the UniSQ parental leave online hub.

The hub includes templates (such as a leave communication plan template, where supervisors and employees can map out how the University should engage with the employee during their leave); tools (such as a leave calculation tool, where employees can enter details of their employment and leave to find out what leave they're eligible for); and explainers (such KIT days and how they can be utilised) and videos that educate and engage. For example, the online hub landing page features UniSQ Multimedia Coordinator Luke Stephenson speaking about his choice to take primary caregiver's leave (Image 1; Table 12).

Image 1: Video screengrab of Luke Stephenson, UniSQ Multimedia Coordinator, discussing his choice to take primary caregiver's leave.

What factors did you consider before deciding to take parental leave?
When my wife and I were deciding on how to manage parental leave, there are a couple of key factors that really influenced our decision to take 12 months off. First and foremost, my wife has been incredibly supportive of my career. Over the years, she's made several sacrifices, including leaving a position and adjusting her own professional aspirations so that I could pursue opportunities that are important to me. When we found out we were expecting, we had a conversation about what would be best for our family. We both agreed that it was important for her to have the chance to focus on her career without having to make another sacrifice. She loves what she does and has a strong passion for the agriculture industry and we wanted to make sure that she had the space to continue her growth professionally.
How has UniSQ supported you to make this decision?
Knowing that I had the option to take paid parental leave has really put my wife at ease. It gave us the flexibility to ensure that she wouldn't have to take more time off from her career. This was important to us given the commitments she already made during the IVF journey. The support from UniSQ made our decision to have me stay at home with the baby much easier and allowed us to plan with confidence and peace of mind.
What are you most looking forward to about parental leave?
What I'm most looking forward to during my time with my child is just simply being a dad and having a little family of my own. We're thrilled to be welcoming a baby girl and I can't wait to spend this special time with her. One of our hopes is that as she grows up, she'll look back and see that just because something is considered normal doesn't mean it's the only way to do things. By myself taking parental leave and being actively involved in her early life, my wife and I really hope to set an example that choices should be made based on what's best for you and your family, not just what's considered traditional.

Table 12: Video transcript of Luke Stephenson, UniSQ Multimedia Coordinator, discussing his choice to take primary caregiver's leave.

Image Grid 1: Example employee testimonials featured on the UniSQ online parental leave hub.

The quotes within the image:

"KIT days assisted greatly with my transition back to work. I used them to attend team planning days, take part in research activities and participate in professional development. This allowed me to engage with my team and maintain some research momentum, on my own terms whilst I was still on parental leave."

– Female academic staff member

"KIT days allowed me to manage my return to work in a way that supported me and my family. These days allowed me to transition back to work by catching up on changes and whilst working out the new work-life balance."

– Female professional staff member

Backfilling communication support

Feedback indicated that staff expectations of having their role backfilled were often not met. This highlighted a gap in communication. The possibility of backfilling a role is determined on a case-by-case basis and so cannot be guaranteed, but needs to be clearly communicated to staff taking leave so they have reasonable expectations about the progression of their role and duties while they are away. To support this, the University developed Backfilling Communication Guidelines and a Backfilling Conversation Guide in early 2023. These resources were developed to support supervisors and employees to have transparent conversations about backfilling options and expectations. These resources were initially piloted within STEMM work areas in 2023. Unfortunately, the vacancy of the Senior Advisor (Gender Equity and Inclusion) role from mid-2023 meant there was limited resourcing to encourage and track the ongoing usage of these resources, and this work is slated for further progression in the future.

Breast/chestfeeding support

The University offers a breast/chestfeeding facility at each campus that contains comfortable seating, baby change tables, fridge, microwave and washing amenities. However, these facilities are not easily accessible to all staff, and do not all contain private feeding areas. To better support returning staff members to breast/chestfeed or express milk on-campus around their work schedule, information is communicated through parental leave resources with instructions for either sourcing a suitable private space and amenities with supervisory guidance, or requesting vacant space allocation from the University's facilities management unit. Other changes introduced in parallel with the new Parental Leave Procedure included the provision of paid lactation breaks, counted as work time, instead of the

previous requirement for breast/chestfeeding employees to 'make up' time. Key contacts in the People Portfolio, including the Associate Director (Diversity and Talent Strategy), are also advertised to facilitate this sensitive process if needed.

Outcomes

Parental leave uptake

Over 2022-2024, parental leave uptake was similar for women (2.3% of all women took parental leave) and men (2.4% of all men taking parental leave) (Table 14; Table 15; Chart 3). Professional men had the highest rates of taking parental leave among their cohort (3.1%) with professional women close behind (2.8%), while non-STEMM academic women had the lowest rates (0.8%). 2022-2024 rates of leave for each cohort were similar to 2019-2021, though the biggest discrepancy was a 1% decrease in rates of academic STEMM men taking leave (Table 15).

		2022		2023		2024	
		F HC	M HC	F HC	M HC	F HC	M HC
Academic	STEMM	184	228	198	246	200	244
	Non-STEMM	177	136	160	125	157	117
Professional		740	405	761	413	716	375
	Total	1,101	769	1,119	784	1,073	736
	Annual total	1,870		1,903		1,809	

Table 13: University staff distribution by gender and staff type 2022-2024.

Note: HC = Head count.

		2022				2023				2024			
		F		M		F		M		F		M	
		HC	%	HC	%	HC	%	HC	%	HC	%	HC	%
Academic	STEMM	2	1.1%	8	3.5%	4	2%	2	0.8%	5	2.5%	1	0.4%
	Non-STEMM	2	1.1%	3	2.2%	0	0%	2	1.6%	2	1.3%	1	0.9%
Professional		20	2.7%	14	3.5%	24	3.2%	8	1.9%	18	2.5%	15	4%
	Total	24	2.2%	25	3.3%	28	2.5%	12	1.5%	25	2.3%	17	2.3%
	Annual total	49 / 2.6%				40 / 2.1%				42 / 2.3%			

2022-2024 F totals	Academic STEMM: HC 11 / 1.9%	Academic non-STEMM: HC 4 / 0.8%	Professional: HC 62 / 2.8%	All staff types: HC 77 / 2.3%
2022-2024 M totals	Academic STEMM: HC 11 / 1.5%	Academic non-STEMM: HC 6 / 1.6%	Professional: HC 37 / 3.1%	All staff types: HC 54 / 2.4%

Table 14: Parental leave uptake by gender and staff type 2022-2024.

Note: HC = Head count. % = % who took parental leave of same cohort in same time period.

	Academic STEMM	Academic non-STEMM	Professional	All staff types
2019-2021 F totals	HC 10 / 2.1%	HC 4 / 0.7%	HC 71 / 3.2%	HC 85 / 2.6%
2022-2024 F totals	HC 11 / 1.9% (↓ 0.2%)	HC 4 / 0.8% (↑ 0.1%)	HC 62 / 2.8% (↓ 0.4%)	HC 77 / 2.3% (↓ 0.3%)
2019-2021 M totals	HC 16 / 2.5%	HC 8 / 1.9%	HC 33 / 2.8%	HC 57 / 2.5%
2022-2024 M totals	HC 11 / 1.5% (↓ 1%)	HC 6 / 1.6% (↓ 0.3%)	HC 37 / 3.1% (↑ 0.3%)	HC 54 / 2.4% (↓ 0.1%)

Table 15: Parental leave uptake by gender and staff type comparing 2019-2021 to 2022-2024.

Note: HC = Head count. % = % who took parental leave of same cohort in same time period.

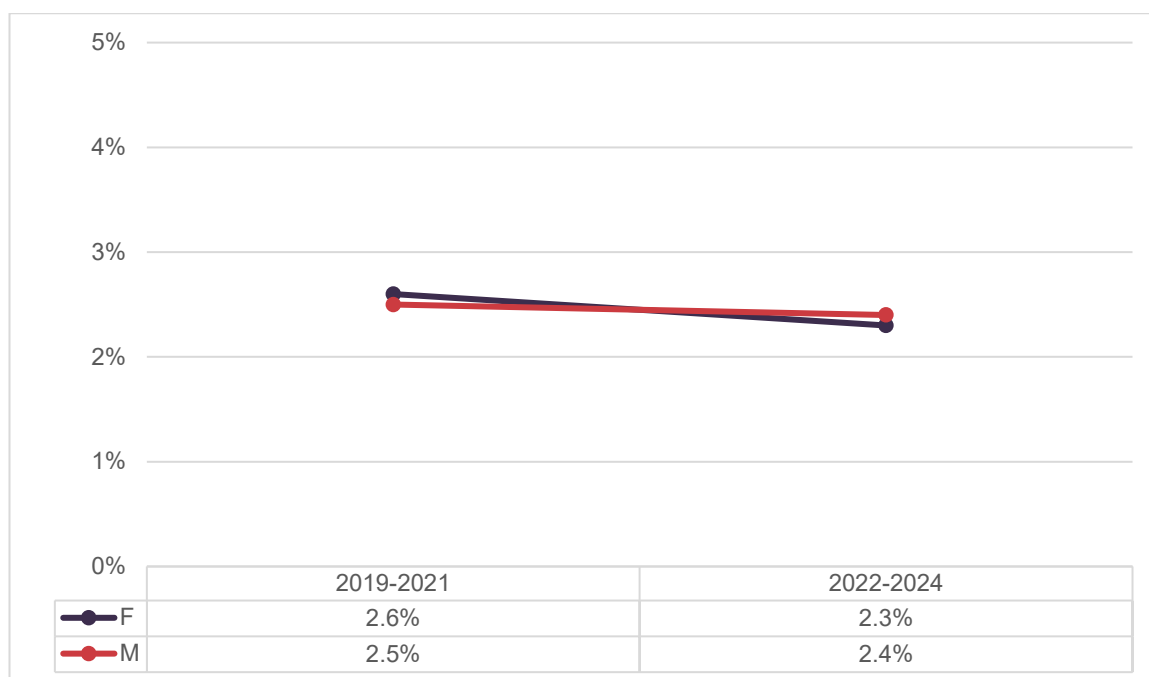|	2019-2021	2022-2024
F	2.6%	2.3%
M	2.5%	2.4%

Chart 3: Parental leave uptake by gender as a percentage of same cohort comparing 2019-2021 to 2022-2024.

Comparing 2019-2021 to 2022-2024, improvements were seen in the gender balance of leave types taken (Table 16; Chart 4). The gender balance in parental and/or primary caregiver's leave was similar, but with a 3% increase in men taking this leave type (from 13% to 16%). Most significantly, over 2022-2024 women made up 20% of those who took partner leave, where they had taken no partner leave in the previous time period. These improvements indicate staff have an increasing understanding of their entitlements and signify a positive shift towards greater balance between genders and the parenting roles they take on.

UniSQ

	2022				2023				2024			
	F		M		F		M		F		M	
	HC	%	HC	%	HC	%	HC	%	HC	%	HC	%
Parental and/or PCG Leave	20	41%	3	6%	26	65%	4	10%	21	50%	6	14%
Partner Leave	4	8%	22	45%	2	5%	8	20%	4	10%	11	26%
Total	24	49%	25	51%	28	70%	12	30%	25	60%	17	40%

2022-2024 F totals	**Parental and/or PCG Leave:** HC 67 / 84%	**Partner Leave:** HC 10 / 20%
2022-2024 M totals	**Parental and/or PCG Leave:** HC 13 / 16%	**Partner Leave:** HC 41 / 80%

Table 16: Parental leave by gender and leave type 2022-2024.

Note: HC = Head count. % = % of all employees who took parental leave in the same time period.
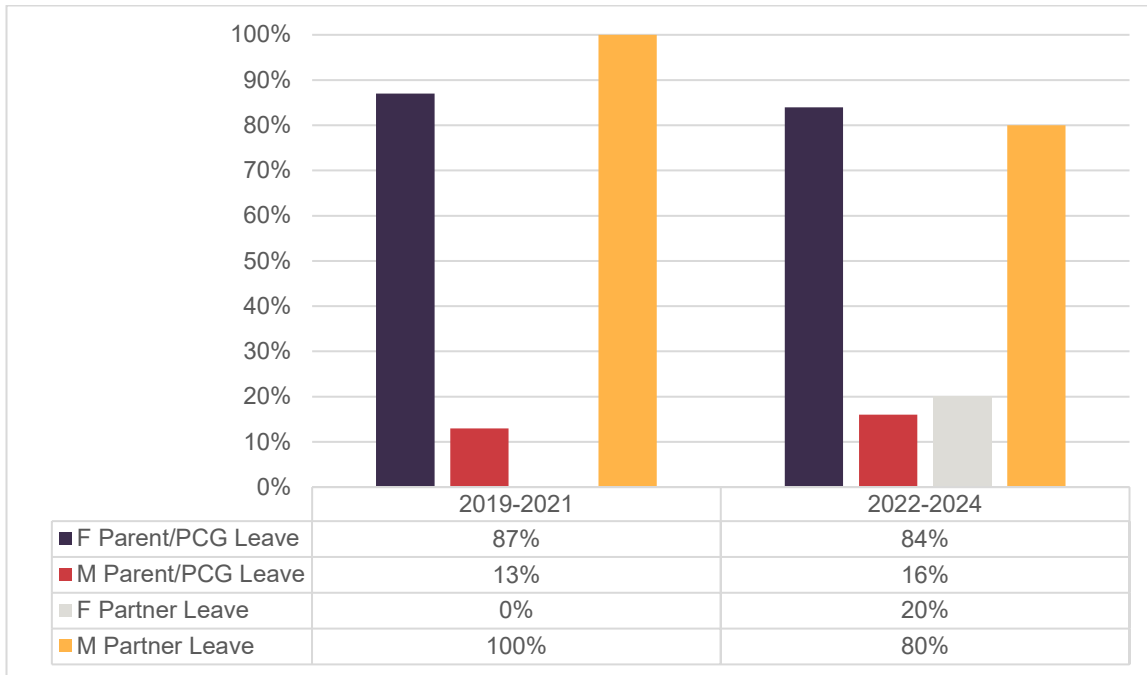

	2019-2021	2022-2024
■ F Parent/PCG Leave	87%	84%
■ M Parent/PCG Leave	13%	16%
■ F Partner Leave	0%	20%
■ M Partner Leave	100%	80%

Chart 4: Parental leave by gender and leave type, comparing 2019-2021 to 2022-2024.

Keeping in Touch days uptake

Over 2022-2024, 10 employees took at least one KIT day (and several took multiple KIT days) during their leave to participate in workplace planning or professional development. This is a 400% increase from KIT days uptake over 2019-2021 and shows improved staff and supervisor awareness of this opportunity for individuals to stay up to date with their workplace and support their return to work (Table 17).

	2022	2023	2024	Total
F HC	3	4	3	10
M HC	0	0	0	0
Total	3	4	3	10

2019-2021 Total	2
2022-2024 Total	10 (↑ 8)

Table 17: KIT days uptake by gender 2019-2021.

Note: HC = Head count.

Impact

Employee experience

A survey was conducted in October 2024 to gather experiential feedback from staff members who had taken parental leave over 2022-2024. Twenty-six participants engaged with the survey, though no men took part despite efforts to engage this cohort (Table 18).

		F HC	M HC	Total
Academic	STEMM	2	0	2
	Non-STEMM	1	0	1
Professional		23	0	23
	Total	26	0	26

Table 18: Demographics of 2024 parental leave evaluation participants.

Note: HC = Head count.

Staff satisfaction with support to prepare for leave and apply for leave decreased minimally by 0.3 points compared to the satisfaction ratings acquired in 2022, and satisfaction with the return-to-work experience remained the same (Tables 19, 20, 21 and 22). Satisfaction with support from UniSQ during leave increased by 0.5 points, which was previously the lowest-scoring area. Academic non-STEMM women (n = 1) tended to score the lowest, where professional women (n = 23) scored the highest (though note the low participant numbers for academic women and lack of male representation). Satisfaction was around 4/5 for all aspects of parental leave, which is a positive result, though indicates there is still room for improvement in the employee experience.

		"How satisfied were you with the support from UniSQ to prepare and apply for parental leave?"		
		F av. satisfaction	M av. satisfaction	Av. satisfaction rating
Academic	STEMM	3	-	3
	Non-STEMM	2	-	2
Professional		4.1	-	4.1
Av. satisfaction rating		4	-	4

Table 19: Staff satisfaction with support from UniSQ to prepare and apply for parental leave.

		"How satisfied were you with the support from UniSQ during your parental leave?"		
		F av. satisfaction	M av. satisfaction	Av. satisfaction rating
Academic	STEMM	3	-	3
	Non-STEMM	3	-	3
Professional		4	-	4
Av. satisfaction rating		3.9	-	3.9

Table 20: Staff satisfaction with support from UniSQ during parental leave.

		"How satisfied were you with your return-to-work experience?"		
		F av. satisfaction	M av. satisfaction	Av. satisfaction rating
Academic	STEMM	3.5	-	3.5
	Non-STEMM	3	-	3
Professional		4.1	-	4.1
Av. satisfaction rating		4	-	4

Table 21: Staff satisfaction with return-to-work arrangements.

	2019-2021	2022-2024
Satisfaction with support from UniSQ to prepare/apply for leave	4.3	4 (↓ 0.3)
Satisfaction with support from UniSQ while on leave	3.4	3.9 (↑ 0.5)
Satisfaction with return-to-work experience	4	4 (no change)

Table 22: Staff satisfaction with parental leave comparing 2019-2021 to 2022-2024.

Most survey participants indicated that they utilised a wide range of resources and supports to understand their entitlements and plan their leave, including UniSQ online resources, the EA, and advice from their supervisor, colleagues and the People Portfolio. 66% of participants found these either somewhat or very helpful, and 66% of participants also found the process of applying for leave either somewhat or very user-friendly (Table 23). However, feedback highlighted that staff often still found the process of understanding their entitlements and calculating the different leave types quite onerous. For example, one participant expressed, "The process has improved, however it is still confusing and disjointed … there is no information or calculation that provides this information which is extremely relevant for people that have been working reduced hours prior to maternity leave …" (Table 24).

"The relationship between myself and my supervisor has always been supportive and positive. When your supervisor is approachable, the conversations around parental leave are much easier."

– Female professional staff member

Most participants (81%) had contact with their supervisor or colleagues while on leave. 54% reported that the contact made them feel either somewhat or very supported to return to work, however 31% reported feeling either somewhat or very unsupported (Table 23). The primary reason for feeling unsupported was rooted in restructures or organisational changes being made while employees were on leave, and feeling they were not sufficiently consulted in change considerations. This sentiment was mentioned by one professional woman: "Consideration needs to be given to those who are on parental leave during times of change and ensure people feel included and supported especially when they are not seen by decision makers" (Table 24).

65% of participants returned to work following their leave on reduced fractional arrangements, all of whom found these arrangements supportive to transition back into work and to manage work and home commitments (Table 23). Those who returned full-time did so due to financial reasons or because they had a spouse who took on most of the parenting duties. 68% of participants felt somewhat or very supported by the contact with their supervisor to discuss how they were managing their return to work.

27% felt somewhat or very unsupported but did not provide further explanation – this should be further investigated to identify where improvements can be made to ensure staff feel supported in their return to work. The review also found that only 23% of participants utilised any resources to support their return, such as the Employee Assistance Program or UniSQ online resources, citing lack of awareness or understanding of how they could help. This suggests there could be improved communication from the University and/or supervisors to make employees aware of the resources available to them.

"The opportunity to access flexibility when returning from parental leave has been vital to my successful transition back to work."

– Female professional staff member

19% of participants utilised breast/chestfeeding facilities (either campus facilities or a private office) and all were somewhat or very satisfied with these (Table 23). Others cited they were no longer breast/chestfeeding or expressing, or they arranged this around work hours. However, several participants indicated they didn't know what facilities were available, again highlighting the need for increased communication from supervisors and the University to support the staff return-to-work experience.

	HC	%	HC	%	HC	%	HC	%	HC	%
How helpful were [parental leave] resources/supports in helping you to understand your parental leave entitlements?	Very unhelpful		Somewhat unhelpful		Neither helpful nor unhelpful		Somewhat helpful		Very helpful	
	2	7.7%	6	23%	1	3.8%	7	27%	10	39%
How user-friendly was the process of applying for parental leave?	Not at all user-friendly		Not very user-friendly		Neutral		Somewhat user-friendly		Very user-friendly	
	0	0%	4	15%	5	19%	14	54%	3	12%
How supported did [contact with your supervisor or colleagues while on leave] make you feel to return to work?	Very unsupported		Somewhat unsupported		Neither supported nor unsupported		Somewhat supported		Very supported	
	6	23%	2	7.7%	4	15%	2	7.7%	12	46%
How supported did [contact with your supervisor to discuss how you were managing return-to-work] make you feel in your return to work?	Very unsupported		Somewhat unsupported		Neither supported nor unsupported		Somewhat supported		Very supported	
	4	18%	2	9%	1	4.5%	4	18%	11	50%
How supported did [resources to support you when you	Very unsupported		Somewhat unsupported		Neither supported nor unsupported		Somewhat supported		Very supported	

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returned to work, e.g., EAP, Wellbeing Services, online resources, etc.?] make you feel in your return to work?	1	17%	1	17%	0	0%	3	50%	1	17%
How satisfied were you with [the facilities you used to breastfeed/chestfeed or express]?	Very dissatisfied		Somewhat dissatisfied		Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied		Somewhat satisfied		Very satisfied	
	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	4	80%	1	20%

Table 23: Feedback on parental leave 2024 (survey results).

Feedback on applying and preparing for parental leave	
Responses to survey question "Do you have any other feedback about your experience of applying and preparing for parental leave (and what, if anything, could have improved it)?"	
Participant 1	"Having to apply for 3 chunks of leave to cover maternity leave was a little onerous but otherwise the process was good."
Participant 5	"The process has improved however it is still confusing and disjointed. For example, I need to manually calculate my carer's leave blocks manually, keep a track of my entitlement and usage in an excel spreadsheet. My entitlements are prorated to my working hours however there is no information or calculation that provides this information which is extremely relevant for people that have been working reduced hours prior to maternity leave e.g. this may be a second child. There is then a back and forward with People Portfolio to work it out and recalculate the entitlements."
Participant 6	"The hub request to submit your leave application isn't the most intuitive process. Having to add the separate lines confused me and not all leave types were listed i.e. government leave entitlements so you have to say leave without pay which caused me to believe I might not be paid during this time. Just some changes around wording might be helpful."
Participant 12	"One very helpful person in People Portfolio helped me with all three of my parental leaves. If it wasn't for her, I would not have known how or where to find any information. Other sources simply did not respond."
Participant 13	"At the start I found that People Portfolio were not very flexible with how I wanted to take my parental leave."
Participant 14	"Applying for the different leave entitlements was confusing. Logging it as parental leave, then the extra leave were given. Very confusing"
Participant 15	"When I contacted People Portfolio, I was referred to the policy and enterprise agreement. I submitted the request with the times/week, I thought I was entitled. I did not have further communication to check with me about how long I am eligible and any additional leave I may be able to take. I have been in touch with my supervisor and people from my School, but I would appreciate having more information/support from the admin/people portfolio as some academics may not know the procedure/parental leave package. I do not have a RTW plan yet. I have a date, and I imagine I will resume my work then."
Participant 17	"Seeing more examples of what other employees have done to utilise the time they have."
Feedback on experience of being on parental leave	
Responses to survey question "Do you have any other feedback about your experience of being on parental leave (and what, if anything, could have improved it)?"	
Participant 4	"There is still somewhat of a barrier between supervisor and employee in discussing expectations of the type of contact the employee wishes to have while on leave."
Participant 6	"It would be good to have regular catch up scheduled before you commence your leave. Make it optional, perhaps, but if you have something scheduled in before you leave then you don't get forgotten about. Then you can have 3 monthly catch ups to discuss the current happenings in the team and Uni and just to keep in touch."
Participant 8	"Emailing was good. It was a lovely way to separate babies and work."
Participant 11	"Consideration needs to be given to those who are on parental leave during times of change and ensure people feel included and supported especially when they are not seen by decision makers. If I did not return early I am unsure how I would have been treated during the job allocation and interview processes."

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Participant 15	"I would like more information from the university level, and check ins. I guess we are all doing more than we should, so certainly it is difficult, but I would appreciate additional contacts and advice before RTW."
Participant 17	"It would be good to know if there are changes happening with my job or restructures/etc that I have been kept informed and also invited to attend consultation meetings."
Participant 23	"I really valued the amount of leave available - 6 months. It allowed me to stay at home for a total of 11 months, without financial stress. I felt really supported in my choice to be a full-time Mum while the University held my position for my return and allowed me to step straight back into my career when I was ready."
Participant 27	"It was great I was getting updated, however it wasn't all positive as it was discussions about the possibility of being made redundant while I was on maternity leave due to the restructure. I was going to have to submit an EOI for my current position and interview while I was 5 weeks post partum."
Feedback on experience of returning to work **Responses to survey question "Do you have any other feedback about your return-to-work experience (and what, if anything, could have improved it)?"**	
Participant 5	"The first time returning from parental leave was more difficult as I had twins who were frequently sick for their first 6 months in daycare, this often made it difficult when trying to return as a reliable team member. 3 days of carers leave also did not go very far, especially with the two children and therefore did need to unfortunately utilize my other leave."
Participant 7	"I think there should be regular check-ins with the Team Leader/Supervisor during the first few months."
Participant 9	"Returning to work is hard full stop. Having a good relationship with your supervisor is important."
Participant 12	"I am fortunate to work in a very supportive team. From a professional perspective the most challenging experience I have had returning to work is striking a balance in my team where my job still feels like my job when only returning to my role in a fractional capacity. It has been challenging to reintegrate and reestablish myself in my position when the secondee has remained in the team to assist with my return to work arrangements. I have been appreciative of having the transitional support though."
Participant 14	"I loved the return to work after one year option. Thankyou. I love the fact that it's easy to take time off work to look after sick children (although the struggle with work-life balance and guilt at not being able to work as I did before children is very real). My managers were decent about the RTWk experience."
Participant 16	"It would be good to know more details about it so I can prepare my return with time."
Participant 19	"very supported by my team and supervisors"
Participant 23	"I believe my situation was different from most in the sense that I came back to a role which needed a lot of attention. I felt like I was expected to be able to achieve the same amount of work as someone working a full time position and this wasn't achievable. Resulting in me coming back to 5 days a week much quicker than I was anticipating because my role needed it."
Participant 24	"I didn't feel supported to return to my substantive role as it required some travel out of campus which I advised I would be limited in ability to do. At the time I was offered another role which really did not match with my level of experience however was made to feel this was the best option by the manager at the time. I feel it is very important to consider what allowances can be made and have the conversation rather than assume anything is better for a returning parent. This was a negative experience at the time and I wish I had more support and knowledge to stand up for myself in returning to my substantive role."

TABLE 24: Example feedback items on parental leave 2024 (survey results).

Further actions

Reference	Rationale/Evidence	Actions & Outputs	Timeframe (start & end)	Person/Group responsible for implementing action	Senior Leader accountable for action delivery	Desired Outcomes/Targets/Success Indicators
1	Work to improve backfilling discussions between supervisors and staff was not progressed due to key staffing vacancies.	Promote the online parental leave hub and encourage supervisors to utilise the available resources to support transparent backfilling conversations.	Ongoing	People Portfolio	Chief People Officer	Improvements in staff ratings of satisfaction with support from UniSQ to prepare for parental leave in future parental leave evaluations.
2	Feedback indicated some staff did not feel confident in accurately calculating their leave entitlements.	Improve the user-friendliness of the leave calculation tool and promote its availability via the online parental leave hub.	Ongoing	People Portfolio	Chief People Officer	Improvements in staff ratings of satisfaction with support from UniSQ to prepare for parental leave in future parental leave evaluations.
3	Women take the majority of parental and primary caregiver's leave, and men take the majority of partner leave.	Further investigate barriers to men taking parental or primary caregiver's leave and women taking partner leave, to inform future initiatives.	2025-2026	People Portfolio	Chief People Officer	Improvement in gender balance of parental leave uptake by leave type.
4	Feedback indicated staff did not feel sufficiently consulted regarding organisational changes or restructures while on parental leave.	Update parental leave resources to support supervisors to have these conversations, and rollout communications regarding these resources to increase supervisor engagement.	2025-2026	People Portfolio	Chief People Officer	Improvements in staff ratings of satisfaction with support from UniSQ during parental leave in future parental leave evaluations.
5	27% of surveyed staff in 2022 felt unsupported by the contact with their supervisor when they returned to work.	Update parental leave resources to support supervisors to appropriately support returning staff, and rollout communications regarding these resources to increase supervisor engagement.	2025-2026	People Portfolio	Chief People Officer	Improvements in staff ratings of satisfaction with their return-to-work experience in future parental leave evaluations.

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