

UCD Employee Guide Supporting Carers at Work



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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. 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 employees.

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. 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.²

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.³ Employees in this age range can have dual caring responsibilities for children in addition.

“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 community⁴; it is estimated that this group saves the Irish economy about €20 billion through their unpaid duties.”⁵

“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 of their physical health, mental health, employment and work-life balance as a whole”.^{6 7}

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. The outputs of this research project, expected in 2024, will further support UCD to evolve

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

² 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>.

³ Central Statistics Office, Health, Disability, Caring and Volunteering Statistics: [CSO Statistics 2022](https://www.cso.ie/en/media/cso/images/publications/cso-statistics-2022)

⁴ UCD CAREWELL: <https://carewellproject.com>

⁵ 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>.

⁶ UCD Carewell: <https://carewellproject.com>

⁷ 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>.

this framework for employees who are carers. In addition, UCD Gender Equality Action Plan includes actions related to workplace supports for carers. The Carer’s Framework will be further developed over the course of the action plan.

2. Overview of UCD Carer Friendly Policies

Carer Friendly Policies⁸ 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) Information on working during carers leave is described in the next section.
Shorter Working Year	
Career Break	
Phased Return to Teaching: This applies to Faculty who have availed of Carer’s Leave for 24 weeks or more and All Staff are entitled to a €500 upskilling grant.(UCD Support for Family Related Leave Policy and Guidelines.)	
<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 manager or HR Partner if you require further information.</p>	

A quick overview of each of these policies can be found 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.

⁸Please refer to the relevant policies for full information in relation to eligibility and accessing supports as each policy remains the official document.

2.1 Overview of Flexible Working Options

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.

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.

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.

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

UCD Support for Family Related Leave Policy

Faculty 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.

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.

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.

2.2 Types of Leave for Carers at UCD

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

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.

Carer's Leave

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.) Before commencing work or training, it must be approved by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs.

Returning from Carer's 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.

3. Balancing Work and Caring Responsibilities

The University recognises that experiences of employees providing care can vary greatly, and supports required may change over time. As a carer, you are encouraged to engage in discussions with your line manager about how you best can be supported by your manager and UCD. The following provides some guidance to consider and inform how you can have discussions with your line managers about balancing work and caring responsibilities, flexibility and leave.

Getting the best from your conversation

Prepare
<p>Meeting with your manager is an opportunity to have open conversations about what options are available. Depending on the nature of the care you are providing this may vary over time.</p> <p>Before approaching your manager:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Review this guide in conjunction with the relevant policies.● Consider what short, medium and long term supports may need to be put in place.● Talk to other supports such as a HR Partner, EAS, or trusted colleagues in advance if required.
Book a Meeting
<p>Schedule a meeting with your manager. Having a time and date in the diary means you're not catching your manager on the hop, and they can also prepare for the meeting.</p> <p>Ask to have conversations in a private place where you won't be interrupted by anyone else. You can also book some private space to have your conversation in confidence.</p>
Make a plan
<p>Your manager is there to support you, together, you can come up with an action plan which works from both perspectives. Your manager may need some time to seek advice themselves or find out what is on offer.</p> <p>Discuss supports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Flexible Working and Leave Options<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Discuss flexible working options- Provide as much reasonable notice as possible to your manager or as soon as you return when taking force majeure leave and medical care leave.- Provide relevant information as required.

- If taking Carers Leave refer to the Support for Family Related Leave Guide to support developing a plan.
- **Managing Your Workload**
 - Be transparent about workloads. If you need support, you should speak to your Head of School/Unit/line manager. Similarly, if you feel you can help elsewhere, you should offer your support.
- **Establish the level of confidentiality with your manager.**
 - Clarify with your manager who knows about your caring responsibilities and who the employee is happy to know.
 - Agree if others should/are required to be informed of the adjustments and by who.
- **Agree a timeline for check-ins.**
 - Communicate that you may have different support needs at different stages.

Follow Up

This is really important as caring can evolve over time.

- Maintain open and on-going communication with their manager about balancing caring and workload and when flexibility is required. It may be that you need to tweak the adjustments if this happens.
- Caring responsibilities can, at times, place a burden on individuals. Taking time for self-care and minding your mental health and well-being is critical for your well-being and for the well-being of those you care for. You are encouraged to check-in with your line manager about balancing workload and caring responsibilities.

Balancing career development and progression with Care

You may also wish to discuss career development and progression and balancing care.

Talk to your line manager about a flexible approach to support career planning and career development opportunities where feasible.

Faculty Promotions: 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.

Making a Plan for taking Carers Leave

If you are considering longer term leave under the Carers Leave policy, please review this guidance in conjunction with the Support for Family Related Leave Policy and Guidance. This provides guidance for employees and will help you and your manager plan for before, during and returning from carer's leave. This includes a reduced teaching load for one semester for faculty and an upskilling grant for all staff. Full information is available via **UCD Support for Family Related Leave Policy and Guidelines**.

4. Supports and Resources

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 of supports that may be of assistance or raising awareness on topic please contact edi@ucd.ie

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