

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



Vice-Chancellor's GENDER EQUALITY FUND Final Report 2017

Improving Access to and Information on Parental Leave Entitlements

Authors: **Prof Janice Aldrich-Wright**, School of Science and Health
Dr Kieryn McKay, Office of the DVC VP (Academic)
Dr Kate McBride, School of Medicine
Dr Freya MacMillan, School of Science and Health

VC Gender Equality Fund Final Report: Improving Access to Information on Parental Leave Entitlements

Project lead: Professor Janice Aldrich-Wright

Report prepared by: Dr Kieryn McKay, Dr Kate McBride, Dr Freya MacMillan, Professor Janice Aldrich-Wright

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. INTRODUCTION | 3 |
| PROJECT OVERVIEW | 3 |
| 2. PARENTAL LEAVE ONLINE INFORMATION REVIEW – KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS | 4 |
| 2.1. FINDINGS | 4 |
| ‘YOUR LEAVE’ HR ONLINE (PARENTAL LEAVE SUBSECTION) | 4 |
| ‘MANAGING FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES’ HR ONLINE | 4 |
| ‘SUPPORTING PARENTS TOOLKIT’ EQUITY & DIVERSITY ONLINE | 6 |
| GENERAL REVIEW | 6 |
| 2.2. RECOMMENDATIONS | 6 |
| 3. PARENTAL LEAVE SURVEY – KEY FINDINGS | 8 |
| 3.1. SURVEY OVERVIEW | 8 |
| KEY COMPONENTS FOR ANALYSIS | 8 |
| 3.2. FINDINGS | 10 |
| ACCESS TO PARENTAL LEAVE INFORMATION | 10 |
| KEEPING IN TOUCH | 10 |
| GENERAL FINDINGS: STAFF SATISFACTION | 11 |
| ONGOING NEEDS / FLEXIBLE WORK | 11 |
| NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES / PERCEPTIONS | 11 |
| FEMALE STAFF | 12 |
| MALE STAFF | 12 |
| PROFESSIONAL STAFF | 13 |
| ACADEMIC STAFF | 14 |
| 4. PARENTAL LEAVE SURVEY – KEY RECOMMENDATIONS | 15 |
| 5. PARENTAL LEAVE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA | 17 |
| GENDER | 17 |
| EMPLOYMENT TYPE: ACADEMIC V. PROFESSIONAL | 17 |
| EMPLOYMENT CLASSIFICATION: PROFESSIONAL TYPE AND ACADEMIC LEVEL | 18 |
| EMPLOYMENT STATUS: CASUAL, FIXED TERM, ONGOING | 18 |
| DIVISION OF EMPLOYMENT: STEMM V. NON-STEMM | 19 |
| LENGTH OF SERVICE | 19 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 6. ACCESS TO PARENTAL LEAVE ENTITLEMENTS | 20 |
| RATES OF ACCESS TO PARENTAL LEAVE ENTITLEMENTS | 20 |
| LENGTH OF LEAVE | 20 |
| RECENT AND REPEATED ACCESS TO PARENTAL LEAVE | 21 |
| 7. ACCESS TO PARENTAL LEAVE INFORMATION | 22 |
| UNDERSTANDING OF SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO WSU STAFF WITH CARING RESPONSIBILITIES | 22 |
| FIRST POINT-OF-ACCESS TO INFORMATION | 23 |
| EASE/DIFFICULTY DETERMINING ENTITLEMENTS | 24 |
| FAMILIARITY WITH ONLINE RESOURCES FOR EXPECTANT PARENTS AND CARERS | 24 |
| 8. PARENTAL LEAVE EXPERIENCES: SATISFACTION OVERVIEW | 25 |
| SATISFACTION WITH PARENTAL LEAVE OPTIONS | 25 |
| OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH SUPERVISOR/MANAGER SUPPORT | 26 |
| SATISFACTION WITH SUPPORT PRIOR TO TAKING PARENTAL LEAVE | 27 |
| SATISFACTION WITH SUPPORT AFTER TAKING PARENTAL LEAVE | 27 |
| 9. DETAILED EXPERIENCES: BEFORE AND DURING LEAVE | 28 |
| DIFFICULTIES WHILE PREPARING FOR PARENTAL LEAVE | 28 |
| CONTACT WITH UNIVERSITY WHILE ON LEAVE | 29 |
| 10. DETAILED EXPERIENCES: RETURNING TO WORK | 31 |
| 10.1. FLEXIBLE WORK FOR PARENTS AND CARERS AT WSU | 31 |
| CONTINUING CARER NEEDS TO BE AWAY FROM WORK | 31 |
| UPTAKE OF FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS | 32 |
| WORK FROM HOME FREQUENCY | 34 |
| 10.2. FLEXIBLE WORK SATISFACTION | 34 |
| PERCEPTION OF FLEXIBLE WORK ENCOURAGEMENT (BARRIER: MALE STAFF) | 35 |
| EQUAL ACCESS TO FLEXIBLE WORK (BARRIER: ALL STAFF) | 36 |
| EQUAL CAREER OPPORTUNITIES FOR THOSE ENGAGED IN FLEXIBLE WORK (BARRIER: ACADEMIC STAFF) | 36 |
| COMMITMENT TO WSU QUESTIONED (SPECULATIVE) | 36 |
| 11. DIFFICULTIES BALANCING WORK & CARER RESPONSIBILITIES | 37 |
| WORKLOAD EXPECTATIONS AND WORK/LIFE BALANCE (BARRIER: FEMALE ACADEMIC STAFF) | 38 |
| CARER/FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES AS IMPEDIMENT TO WSU CAREER (BARRIER: ACADEMIC STAFF) | 38 |
| PERCEIVED ADVERSE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL LEAVE BREAKS | 38 |
| MISSED CAREER OPPORTUNITIES DUE TO PARENTAL LEAVE (BARRIER: FEMALE ACADEMIC STAFF) | 39 |
| DIFFICULTIES, DISCOMFORT AND DISCRIMINATION | 39 |
| 12. SATISFACTION OVERVIEW: SUFFICIENT SUPPORT FOR PARENTS AND CARERS | 40 |

1. Introduction

Project Overview

The purpose of this study is to explore staff perspectives on the availability of and access to coherent information about Parental Leave and associated entitlements at Western Sydney University, and to better understand the career and organisational experiences of employees with family responsibilities at WSU. In doing so, this study's overarching aim is to bridge some of the gaps that exist between Parental Leave policies and their implementation at Western Sydney University. This study is an ancillary of the Science Australia Gender Equality (SAGE) Project at Western, which is working to improve gender equality across the institution, and relevant findings will contribute to WSU's Athena SWAN Bronze Award application.

Existing resources that support and inform parents and carers at Western Sydney University were reviewed. Some concerns were identified during the discovery process, particularly regarding discrepancies in policy statements and the use of language that excludes adoptive and foster parents. A summary of findings and recommendations related to this review is appended to this report. A survey of staff Parental Leave experiences was also conducted. This study was approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is H12383. The survey resulted in the identification of several obstacles to the uptake of parental leave or associated flexible work entitlements at WSU. These obstacles are noted as Barriers 1–8 in this report. A full summary of survey findings is detailed below. Findings have been incorporated into a suite of recommendations for consultation with HR, Equity and Diversity, and the Vice-Chancellor's Gender Equality Committee.

2. Parental Leave Online Information Review – Key Findings & Recommendations

2.1. Findings

'Your Leave' HR Online (Parental Leave Subsection)

WSU Web >> Office of HR >> Your Leave

https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/people_and_culture/ohr/leave

1. **Maternity Leave Exclusivity:** This section only provides information regarding Maternity Leave and the **Federal Government's** Paid Parental Leave Scheme (PPLS). Yet, the university provides several forms of Parental Leave.
2. **Missing links to further HR Parental Leave Resources:** While HR's 'Managing Family Responsibilities' webpage is accessible via dropdown link under 'Your Leave' on the left-hand navigation bar. However, this information might be easily missed by those looking for advice on Parental Leave.
3. **Missing links to E&D Parental Leave Resources:** This section does not provide links to further information for expecting parents.

'Managing Family Responsibilities' HR Online

WSU Web >> Office of HR >> Your Employment >> Managing Family Responsibilities

https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/people_and_culture/ohr/leave/managing_family_responsibilities

1. **Missing links to E&D Parental Leave Resources:** The "Supporting Parents Toolkit" and Equity & Diversity webpage are not linked to this HR site, though they contain pertinent and very helpful information regarding Parenting Leave.
2. **Conflict of Information:** this site says "Parental leave may not begin earlier than six weeks prior to the due date of the baby unless medical evidence recommends otherwise" (para 2, emphasis added). But the Academic and Professional Staff Enterprise Agreements state that "An Employee may commence maternity leave at any time from 12 weeks prior to the expected date of birth of her child" (See Academic EA Sec 31.8, p.45; See Prof EA Sec 37.8, p.42)

3. **General Reference: Exclusion of Adoptive and Foster Parents:** The opening section inappropriately narrows the conditions under which Parental Leave might be accessed by specifying the entitlement timeline in relation to the “due date of the baby”. The Enterprise Agreements state provisions for adoptive and foster parents that should also be reflected here. The Enterprise Agreements specify that: “Adoption leave may commence immediately prior to the date of placement of the child being adopted” (Academic EA Sec 31.15, p.46; Prof EA Sec 37.15, p.43) and that “Foster parent leave may commence from the time that the child enters an Employee’s care” (Academic EA Sec 31.25, p.47; Prof EA Sec 37.25, p.44)

4. **Parental Leave Application Form:** The site states that “Applications for Parental Leave are completed via hard copy leave form, which can be downloaded via the Forms and Templates page”. But this requires further direction: When proceeding through the ‘Forms and Templates’ link, I correctly assumed the form would appear under the “Managing Pay and Benefits” category (accessed via dropdown link). However, I immediately searched for a specific ‘Parental Leave’ form, which does not exist. The relevant form is a generic ‘Leave Application Form’. It would be beneficial to indicate as such on the original Managing Family Responsibilities webpage.

5. **Centralised Maternity Leave Replacement Fund: Exclusion of Adoptive, Fostering, and Partner Parents:** this section provides information as to how Parental Leave is paid for by the university. However, the title “Centralised Maternity Leave Replacement Fund” may be misleading. Are employees not taking Maternity Leave (i.e., those taking Adoption Leave, Partner Leave or Fostering Leave) also paid via these arrangements? If so, the language should be adjusted here to include other forms of parental leave takers.

6. **Return to work after Parental Leave / Entitlement: Exclusion of Adoptive, Fostering, and Partner Parents:** this section provides information pertaining to return to work entitlements but specifies “maternity leave” only, though fathers and adoptive and foster parents are entitled to the same conditions. It currently states: “If you are entitled to paid parental leave, and you return to work full-time or on the same part-time arrangement as you were working prior to taking leave within 12 months of commencing the maternity leave, you will be entitled to a phased return to work. Refer to the relevant University Enterprise Agreement for full details.” (‘Entitlement’ para 1, emphasis added)

'Supporting Parents Toolkit' Equity & Diversity Online

WSU Web >> Equity and Diversity >> Gender Equality >> Parenting Support >> Supporting Parents Toolkit

https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1075889/Supporting_Parents_Toolkit.pdf

1. **Paid Parental Leave (p.4): Exclusion of Adoptive and Foster Parents:** the Supporting Parents Toolkit narrows the conditions under which Parental Leave might be accessed by specifying the entitlement timeline in relation to the "due date of the baby birth" (SPT, p.4). The Enterprise Agreements state provisions for adoptive and foster parents that should also be reflected here. The Enterprise Agreements specify that: "Adoption leave may commence immediately prior to the date of placement of the child being adopted" (Academic EA Sec 31.15, p.46; Prof EA Sec 37.15, p.43) and that "Foster parent leave may commence from the time that the child enters an Employee's care" (Academic EA Sec 31.25, p.47; Prof EA Sec 37.25, p.44)
2. **Pregnancy and Maternity Leave (p.5): Exclusion of Adoptive, Foster and Partner Parents:** This section contains information on 'Notification', 'Varying the Length of Leave' and 'Option to Combine Leave Types' that is relevant to all those taking Parental Leave, not only those that fall under 'Pregnancy' or 'Maternity Leave'.

General Review

1. **Policy Inequity: Unpaid Leave for Long-Term Foster Parents:** According to the Enterprise Agreements, Foster Parents are only entitled to paid leave of 6 weeks for a child under 5 years of age and 3 weeks for a child over 5 years of age (see Academic EA Sec 31.24, p.37; Prof EA Sec 37.24, p.44). There is no provision in either agreement for a long-term Foster Parent to take any unpaid leave.

2.2. Recommendations

1. **Recommendations for HR**
 - a. Clarify leave entitlements:
 - i. The 'Managing Family Responsibilities' page should be amended to reflect the accurate entitlement for access to parental leave
 - ii. Reference to the Parental Leave Application form on the 'Managing Family Responsibilities' page should be clarified. Change text to "Applications for Parental Leave are completed via hard copy Leave

Application Form, which can be downloaded via the Forms and Templates page”

- b. Improve inclusive language
 - i. The Parental Leave subsection on the ‘Your Leave’ webpage should be fully updated to indicate the various forms of Parental Leave available to WSU employees.
 - ii. The ‘Managing Family Responsibilities’ page should be amended to reflect the various timelines for access to all forms of parental leave
 - iii. Reference to the Centralised Maternity Leave Replacement Fund on the ‘Managing Family Responsibilities’ page should include a note that reflects: “this arrangement also applies to those accessing other forms of Parental Leave” or similar
 - iv. The section of the ‘Managing Family Responsibilities’ page that describes Return to Work after Parental Leave Entitlement should replace all references to “maternity leave” with “parental leave”
- c. Improve inter-page networking for key Parental Leave resources
 - i. The ‘Your Leave’ webpage should include a link to the ‘Managing Family Responsibilities’ page and to the Equity and Diversity ‘Parenting Support’ webpage in the body text under the Parental Leave subsection.
 - ii. The ‘Managing Family Responsibilities’ should be networked with other vital resources, including Equity & Diversity’s ‘Parenting Support’ page and a direct link to the Supporting Parents Toolkit

2. Recommendations for Equity and Diversity

- a. Improve inclusive language
 - i. In the Supporting Parents Toolkit, reference to “due date of the baby birth” (p.4) should be removed and replaced with “due date of the baby birth or expected date of commencement of care”. Information should also be amended to reflect the various timelines for access to all forms of parental leave
 - ii. Information in the subsection ‘Pregnancy and Maternity Leave’ that relates to ‘Notification’, ‘Varying the Length of Leave’ and ‘Option to Combine Leave Types’ should be repositioned into a more inclusive section not specified for Maternity

3. Recommendations for VC Gender Equality Committee

- a. Policy revision: consider providing some allowance for unpaid leave in the EA for Foster Parents.

3. Parental Leave Survey – Key Findings

3.1. Survey Overview

The Parental Leave Survey is the primary data collection instrument for this study. In October 2017, the survey was distributed to 226 WSU staff who have accessed parental leave entitlements between 2012 and 2017. Of these, 100 staff members took part in the survey, with a total response rate of 44.0%.

The Office of Human Resources informed that 27 potential participants remain on parental leave and have not yet returned to work. Of these, 8 staff completed the survey (response rate 29.6%). Of the remaining 199 staff who had returned to work, 89 staff completed the survey (response rate 44.7%).

It should be noted that recent discussion with HR Executive Director, Susan Hudson, suggests that some eligible staff members may not have received the Parental Leave Survey invitation to participate. As such, the research team intends to reopen the survey to prospective participants in 2018. Survey findings will be updated at the completion of this process.

Key components for analysis

Three key demographic criteria were selected for comparative analysis throughout the study, in line with SAGE Project interests. These criteria were:

Gender

The SAGE Project is a gender equality initiative designed to advance the retention and progression of women and gender diverse people within the academy and at Western Sydney University. Gender is therefore a key focus of analysis throughout this report, with aim to reveal whether women, men, and gender diverse staff members experience varied rates of difficulty across their experiences of Parental Leave at WSU. It should be noted that while participants were offered a range of gender identities for selection, all staff (100%) who completed the survey identified as either 'female' or 'male'.

Division of Employment (STEMM v. Non-STEMM)

While the SAGE Project's remit will develop to encompass all disciplines and organisational units at the University, its initial purpose is to identify barriers to participation and progression for women and gender diverse people within Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine (STEMM) disciplines. As such, this study takes a particular interest in the relative experiences of STEMM staff accessing parental leave. Where possible, comparative analysis was

performed to determine whether parental leave experiences for staff in WSU STEM Schools and Institutes differ from those in non-STEM Schools and Institutes or other divisions at WSU. The allocation of WSU Schools, Institutes and Divisions is described below.

STEM Schools or Institutes include:

- Hawkesbury Institute for the Environment (HIE)
- MARCS Institute for Brain, Behaviour & Development (MARCS)
- National Institute of Complementary Medicine (NICM)
- Schools of Computing, Engineering & Mathematics (SCEM)
- School of Medicine (SoM)
- School of Nursing & Midwifery (SoNM)
- School of Science & Health (SoSH)
- Translational Health Research Institute (THRI)

Non-STEM Schools or Institutes are defined to include:

- Australia-China Institute for Arts & Culture (ACIAC)
- Graduate Research School (GRS)
- Institute for Culture and Society (ICS)
- School of Business (SoB)
- School of Education (SoE)
- School of Humanities & Communication Arts (SHCA)
- School of Law (SoL)
- School of Social Sciences & Psychology (SSAP)

'Other Divisions', which comprise:

- Academic Division (AD)
- Corporate Strategy & Services Division (CSSD)
- Finance & Resources Division (FRD)
- People & Advancement Division (PAD)
- Research & Development Division (R&D)

Employment Type: Academic v. Professional Staff

Given the distinct nature of academic and professional work in higher education, differences are expected to exist in the practical implementation, workload management, and workplace culture that surrounds experiences of parental leave for academic and professional staff. As such, all survey findings were analysed for employment type.

3.2. Findings

Access to Parental Leave Information

1. Although more than two thirds of staff consider themselves well-informed of support available to WSU parents and carers, males, academics, and staff in STEMM disciplines self-report low levels of understanding
2. Enterprise Agreements are first points of information about Parental Leave entitlements for just over half of respondents, with one third making direct contact with HR. Seeking online information from HR Services and pursuing direct contact with supervisors and managers were also common approaches to determining entitlements. Rates of access to policy, online information, and key staff highlight the need for accurate and up-to-date information to be available through these avenues.
3. Two thirds of staff indicate little or no difficulty in accessing their Parental Leave entitlements. However, open-text responses reported concern about:
 - confusion over entitlements
 - fixed start leave dates for maternity leave (requiring accurate prediction of birth date)
 - delays in leave approvals, incl. relaying impact on Centrelink processes
 - calculating leave (current calendar does not account for public holidays)
 - inefficiency of paper-based leave application form
 - timing of handovers to/from maternity cover staff
 - impossibility of completing workload before commencing parental leave

Barrier 1 (All Staff): Little use of available information resources. Discouragingly, a large proportion of staff were unfamiliar with three key resources available to expecting parents and carers: the “Supporting Parents Toolkit for Staff”, “Parenting Support”, and “Managing Family Responsibilities” sites. Recentness of or repeated access to parental leave did not affect responses, with no improvement in familiarity noted for those who accessed parental leave in 2016 or 2017. Those who accessed parental leave on multiple occasions over the relevant period also showed no improvement in familiarity with these resources.

Keeping in Touch

- Those who took less leave kept in more regular contact with the university, with academics much more frequently connected to the university during their break(s).
- Preferred regularity of contact between staff on parental leave and the university appears to be once or twice per month, though for those on short leave breaks, for male staff, and for academics, high proportions claimed that almost any contact was deemed

“too much”. It should be noted, then, that while once or twice per month may be a commonly favoured degree of contact with the university while on leave, all staff on parental leave should have control over their regularity of engagement with the University.

- Male staff, academics, and/or those on short leave breaks are more motivated to maintain contact to “keep on top of [their] workload”, while female staff and professionals do so to “maintain relationships with colleagues” and for “social or other personal reasons”.
- Broad support was found for a Keep in Touch program, with female professionals most keen to participate.

General Findings: Staff satisfaction

1. A high percentage of staff (78.7%) are satisfied with their individual flexibility
2. A high percentage of staff (79.8%) are satisfied that their supervisor is supportive of their requests for flexible work arrangements
3. Strong proportions of staff approve of the support offered by their supervisors/managers, and immediate colleagues (those in their department, unit or Institute). Less approval is evident of the support offered by HR, senior management, local administration, and broader colleagues (across School or Division). Close associates are therefore critical resources for providing accurate information and offering support and encouragement.

Ongoing Needs / Flexible Work

1. Parents and carers commonly need to attend to caring responsibilities during business hours at least once per month
2. The Maternity Flexible Return to Work option is popular among eligible female staff
3. The most common flexible work options engaged to accommodate caring responsibilities include working from home, flexible start/finish times, or working part-time
4. Very few staff have worked a compressed work week, participated in a job share arrangement, or purchased additional leave.

Negative Experiences / Perceptions

1. Length of leave directly correlates to perceptions of adverse effects of parental leave breaks on career
2. More than half (55.7%) of respondents believe that “the expected workload at Western Sydney University makes it difficult to balance work and home responsibilities”

3. Just under one third (31.46%) of respondents report “difficulties accessing or discomfort in asking for special personal leave, parental leave, flexible working hours”
4. Less than half of all respondents feel that their “School/Division/Institute offers staff engaged in flexible work arrangements the same opportunities as those who are not”
5. Concerningly, 19.3% of staff report that they have “felt discriminated against within [their] School/Institute/Division because of [their] caring responsibilities”
6. One key barrier was identified as applicable to all or most staff:

Barrier 2 (All Staff): Perceived gender inequality of access to flexible work options.

Only 52.3% of survey respondents believe that “people of all gender identities are offered the same opportunities to access flexible work arrangements in their School/Division/Institute”. Only female professional staff were in majority agreement with the statement (68.6%), starkly contrasting academic female staff (13.3%), academic males at (33.3%) and professional males at (45.5%).

Female Staff

- Female staff are highly likely to access Flexible Return to Work options after maternity leave highly likely, especially female professional staff. However, open-text responses indicate that Flexible Return to Work entitlements are confusing for many staff.
- For the majority of professional females, neither lack of opportunity nor perceived lack of commitment are risks associated with flexible work.
- For academic females, lack of opportunity related to flexible work is believed to exist but is not attributable to a perceived lack of commitment.
- One key barriers were identified as disproportionately affecting female staff:

Barrier 3 (Female Academic Staff): Missed career opportunities due to caring responsibilities.

Females were twice as likely as males to feel that they have “missed opportunities for promotion because of Parental Leave breaks or ongoing carer responsibilities”. Academic females were most likely to identify a correlation between parental leave and missed promotion (63.2%, compared with only 21.4% of male academics or 32.1% of female professional staff). The higher incidence of report from female academics is not explained by a length-of-leave correlation.

Male Staff

1. All male staff who participated in the survey accessed Partner Leave
2. The vast majority of male staff who participated in the survey accessed 6 weeks or less of cumulative maternity leave, with only one male staff member accessing 6–20 weeks

3. Nonetheless, male parents and carers cite increased frequency of need to be away from work semi-regularly (once or twice per month) for caring responsibilities once they have returned to work
4. Male staff were least satisfied with Parental Leave provisions available at WSU
5. Male staff self-report the lowest rate (44%) of “good understanding” of support available to WSU parents and carers
6. Male staff present lower rates of uptake of flexible work options, excepting compressed work week
7. Male professional staff expressed the lowest rates of agreement (45.5%) that they “have the flexibility [they] need” and that their supervisor is supportive of their requests for flexible work
8. Male professional staff are particularly unlikely to believe that flexible work is encouraged at WSU
9. Nonetheless, male professional staff were the most confident of all groups that flexible work arrangements do not affect opportunity in their School/Institute/Division
10. Male staff are generally less satisfied with WSU’s support for parents and carers: only one third (36.4) agree that “Western Sydney University provides sufficient support for parents/carers” with slightly more (40.9%) asserting active opposition to the statement. These low rates of satisfaction may be at least partially explained by length-of-leave association, since they correlate with low rates of satisfaction with parental leave entitlement offerings at WSU. Further analysis should be undertaken to determine whether male staff are dissatisfied with the volume of partner leave available to them.
11. One key barrier for male staff was identified as particularly significant for male staff:

Barrier 4 (Male Staff): Low perception that flexible work is encouraged at WSU. Only 30.4% of male staff believe that “flexible work is actively encouraged at WSU” (compared with 52.8% all staff; 60.6% of female). Professional males display only 27.3% agreement with the statement. While professional males demonstrated the lowest rates of agreement (27.3%), academic males were most likely to actively oppose with the statement, with 41.6% either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that flexible work is encouraged at Western Sydney University.

Professional Staff

- Professional staff are more likely to be more informed about support available to parents and carers
- Professional staff are more likely to be more appreciative of support from immediate colleagues
- Professional staff are more likely to be satisfied with overall support provided by WSU

- Professional staff were less likely to identify relationships between caring responsibilities and missed opportunities for promotion

Academic Staff

- Academics are far more likely to access less than 20 weeks of leave than professional staff and far less likely to be satisfied with Parental Leave provisions at WSU
- Academics self-report as being less informed about Parental Leave support options at WSU
- Academic staff were less satisfied with the support offered by their immediate colleagues at their return to work than professional staff
- Academics are twice as likely (29.6%) to report discrimination on the basis of caring responsibilities, with female academic most likely (40%)
- There was a demonstrable negativity from academic staff in open-text comments regarding chances of promotion; concern for relation between exam timetable and workload; part-time arrangements not considered where being pressured/forced to develop a new teaching unit
- Some conflicts were identified between HR procedures and reality of academic life (e.g., difficult to specify which days of week will be worked in part-time arrangements)
- Three key barriers were identified for academic staff:

Barrier 5 (Male Academic Staff): Less understanding of support for parents and carers at WSU. Academic staff half as likely to be apprised of support options than professional staff. Male staff and STEMM academics self-reported the lowest levels of “good understanding”. This may contribute to lesser rates of participation in flexible work options and low perception of encouragement for the uptake flexible work options.

Barrier 6 (Female Academic Staff): Workload expectations impede work/life balance. Academic staff (70.3%) were considerably more likely than professional staff (49.2%) to agree “the expected workload at Western Sydney University makes it difficult to balance work and home responsibilities”. Academic females were most likely to agree (80%), with professional females least likely to agree (46.0%).

Barrier 7 (Academic Staff): Perceived inequality in accessing career opportunities for those engaged in flexible work. Academic staff are far less inclined to believe that opportunities equally likely to be made available to staff engaged in flexible work arrangements as to those who are not, displaying less than half the agreement rates of professional staff. While both male and female academics display low rates of agreement, academic female staff are most likely to actively oppose the statement, with

40% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that career opportunities are distributed equally.

Barrier 8 (Academic Staff): Carer/Family Responsibilities as impediment to WSU

Career. While barely half of all staff believe that carer/family responsibilities impede career progression at WSU, almost three quarters of academic staff (73.1%) believe that staff with caring responsibilities are disadvantage in their career. Female academics were most likely to identify an impediment (80%), and male professional staff were least likely (36.4%).

4. Parental Leave Survey – Key Recommendations

1. **“Congratulations” Pack** to be automatically sent to all staff who apply for Parental Leave. This pack should include:
 - Supporting Parents Toolkit
 - Links to Enterprise Agreements, specifying entitlements
 - Before Leave Check-list: out of office, handover, notifying key stakeholders, etc.
 - Info on return to work / phased return to work provisions
 - Info on breastfeeding, childcare, etc.
 - Emphasis on equal access to entitlements for flexible work and associated arrangements for male staff
2. **HR Procedural Amendments:**
 - a. Replace paper-based leave application form with online application via Staff Online
 - b. Regarding fixed leave start date, either a) allow for a speculative start leave date with a ‘start-leave window’ period of two weeks (one week either side of due date) or b) if start date is already easily adjusted, clarify this accommodation during PL application process
 - c. Allow flexible nomination of days of week for PT academic staff returning to work
 - d. The reclassify ‘Maternity Leave’ as ‘Primary Carers Leave’ should be recommended as a long-term goal for university parental leave provisions
3. **Advice to Supervisors/Managers:**
 - a. Provide clear guidelines + information about PL entitlements, including flexible work and phased return-to-work

- b. Clarify that all staff are entitled to training & development, and should be encouraged to apply for promotion regardless of workload arrangements
 - c. Supply a parental leave check-list, including a timeline that identifies guidelines for hiring/seconding maternity cover staff, meeting with a staff member before they take leave, confirming leave arrangements, and initiating discussions with staff members before they return to work.
- 4. Reduced contact for short-term Parental Leave takers:** Given that staff on shorter leave periods are more likely to be engaged in higher rates of contact (with lower rates of satisfaction), staff on shorter forms of leave should be encouraged to reduce contact while on leave, and supervisors/managers should encourage and enable them to do so.
- 5. Trial 'Keep in Touch' Program.** A 'Keep in Touch' program should be trialled for staff accessing 21+ weeks of Parental Leave. Events/contact should be organised for approximately once per month, staff should be able to opt-in or opt-out of the program at any time, and their regularity of participation should be decided by themselves. Given the motivation of female and professional staff to maintain relationships at work while on leave (as above), a social element is recommended.

5. Parental Leave Survey Participants: Demographic Data

Gender

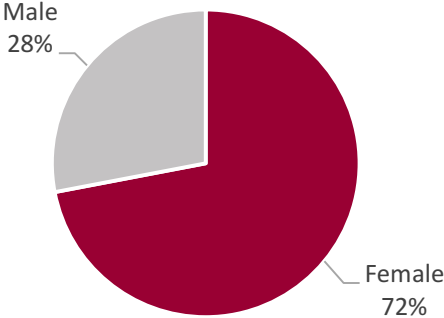


Figure 1: What is your gender identity?

Employment type: Academic v. Professional

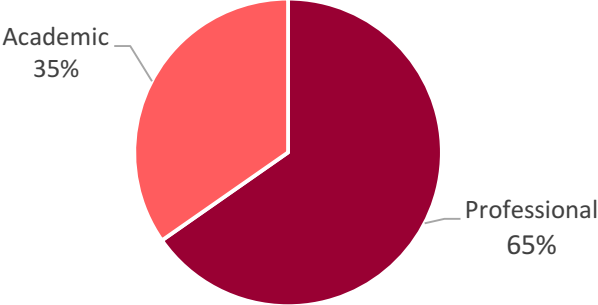


Figure 2:

Employment Type

Position Title by

Employment classification: Professional type and Academic level

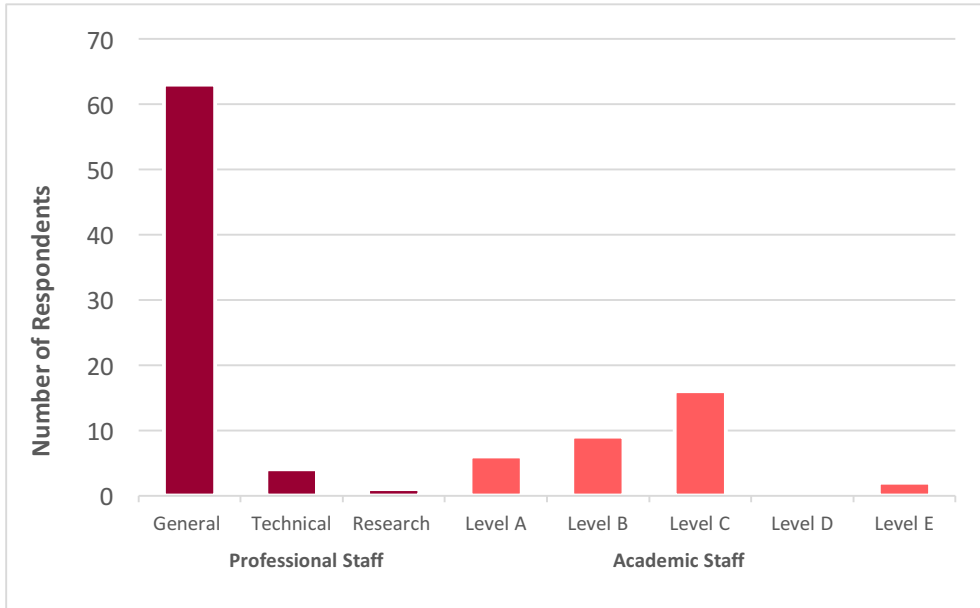


Figure 3: Position Title

Employment Status: Casual, Fixed Term, Ongoing

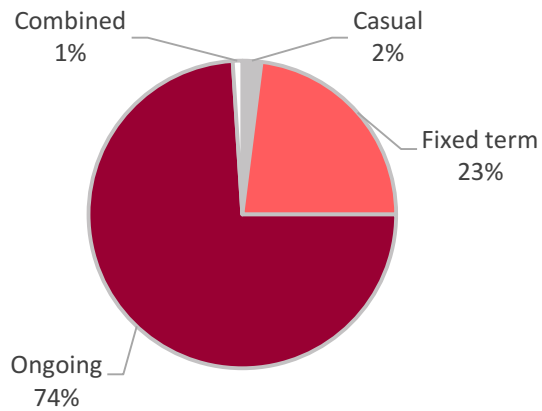


Figure 4: What is the current status of your employment?

Division of employment: STEMM v. Non-STEMM

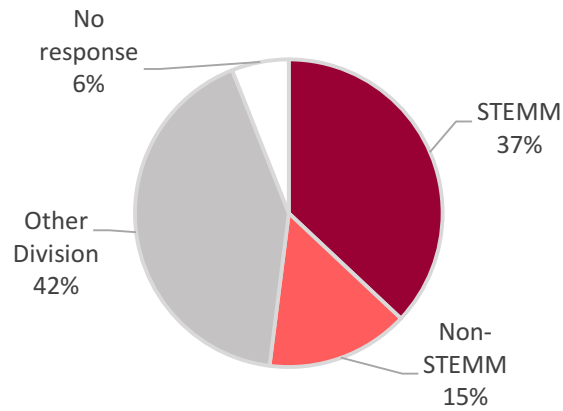


Figure 5: To which School, Institute or Division are your primary responsibilities assigned?

Length of service

The majority of respondents have worked for Western Sydney University for a considerable portion of time. The largest contingent of respondents (48.5%) have worked for WSU for greater than 5 but less than 10 years. Only 25.8% of respondents have worked for WSU for less than five years.

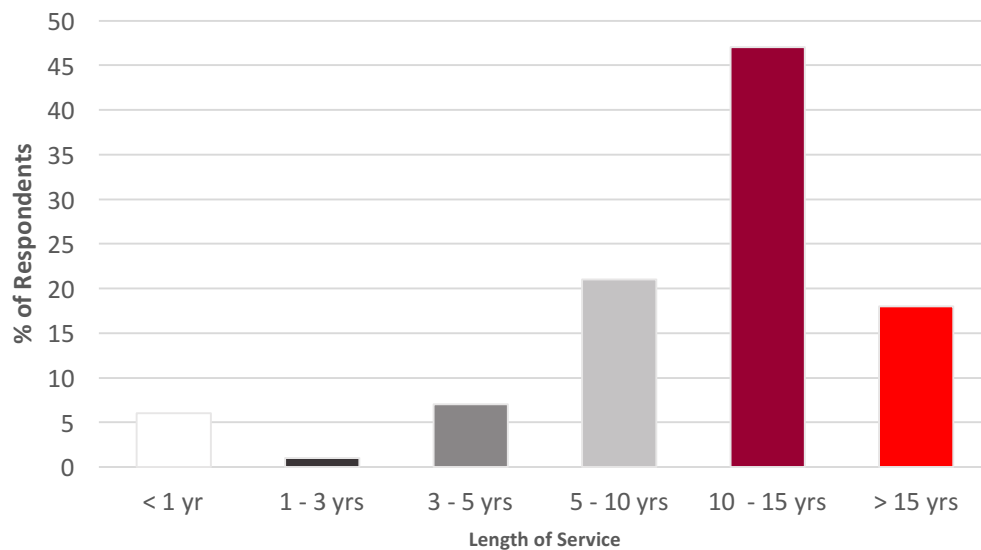


Figure 6. How long have you worked for Western Sydney University?

6. Access to Parental Leave Entitlements

Rates of access to Parental Leave entitlements

Of the 100 staff members who took the survey, 97% reported taking their leave entitlement. Those who had not accessed a parental leave entitlement in the past 5 years were asked a series of follow-up questions and removed from the sample group.

Among those who had taken parental leave, a range of leave types were accessed, with paid maternity leave the most frequent (n=71; 73.2% of respondents), followed by unpaid maternity (n=55; 56.7% of respondents), and paid partner leave (n=24; 24.7%). A few respondents had accessed unpaid partner leave (n=2; 2.1%), with just one respondent reporting foster leave (n=1; 1.0%), and three respondents (3.9%) identifying 'other' parental leave entitlements were accessed.

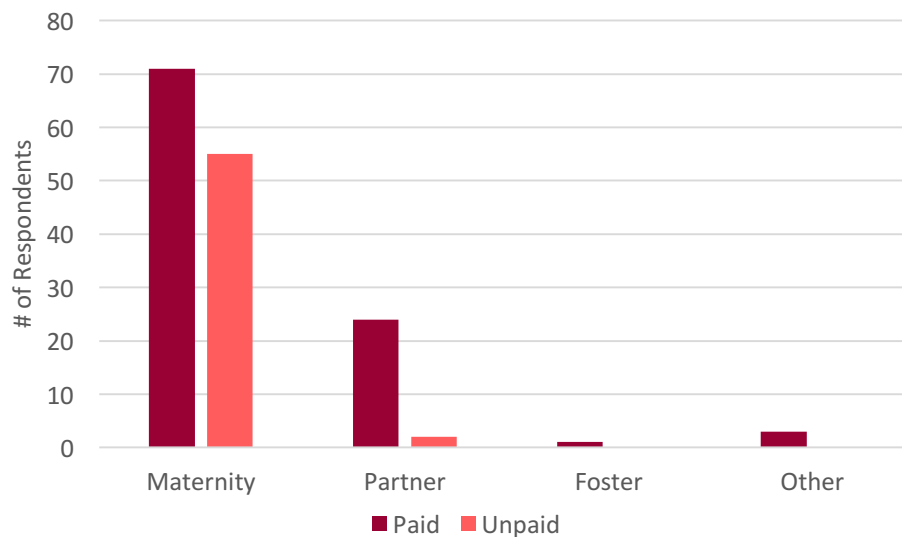


Figure 7: What form(s) of Parental Leave have you accessed [while at WSU]?

Access to maternity leave (paid and unpaid) and partner leave (paid and unpaid) directly correspond to gender, with 100% of maternity leave accessed by female respondents (in line with entitlement conditions) and 100% of partner leave accessed by male respondents. There were no associations between position held, employment level, STEMM or non-STEMM and type of leave taken. Unsurprisingly, 96.9% of all parental leave reported by respondents was accessed by fixed and continuing employees with only two casual staff members participating in the survey.

Length of leave

Respondents were asked to tally their parental leave times (paid and unpaid) across all instances of parental leave. Overall, respondents were equally likely to access leave for less than 20 weeks (29.9%), 21–52 weeks (30.9%), or 1–2 years (30.9%). Only a small percentage (8.3%) of staff have accessed accumulative parental leave of more than 2 years.

However, a clear division exists between academic and professional staff in terms of length of leave, with academics far more likely to access less than 20 weeks of leave (48.5%) than professional staff (18.3%). This is mostly accounted for by academic males, 100% of whom took 6 weeks leave or less, however female academics were also less likely (31.6%) to access 1–2 years of leave than their professional counterparts (45.3%).

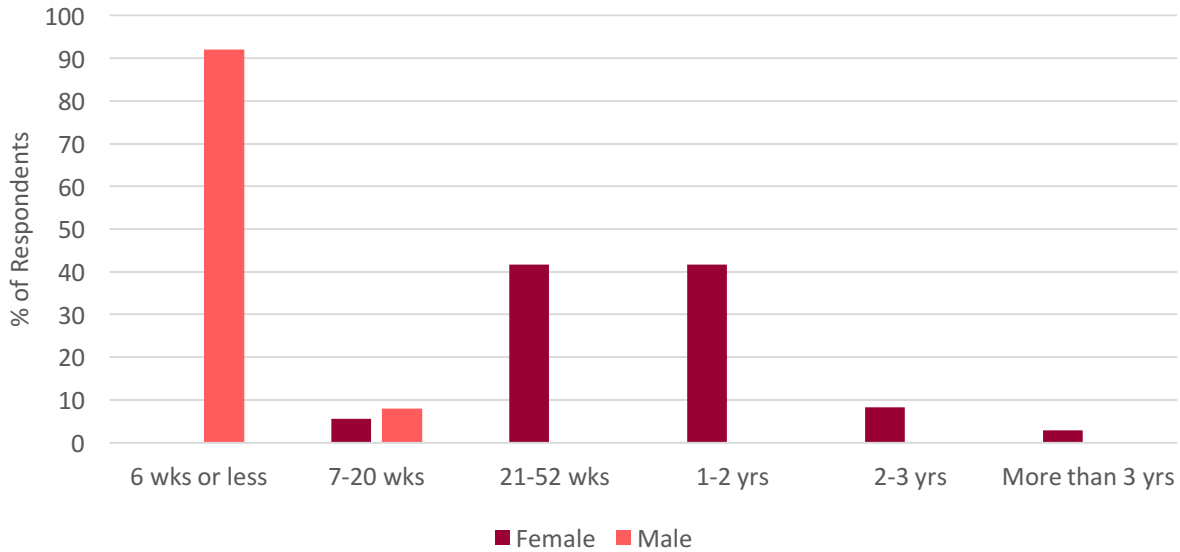


Figure 8: What is the cumulative amount of Parental Leave (all forms and on all occasions) you have taken while at Western Sydney University?

Recent and repeated access to parental leave

Over 80% of all leave was accessed by respondents since 2014. Approximately half (50.52%) of respondents had accessed parental leave on only one occasion between 2012 and 2017, with a considerable percentage (43.3%) accessing parental leave twice, and a small number (6.18%) accessing parental leave on more than two occasions during this period.

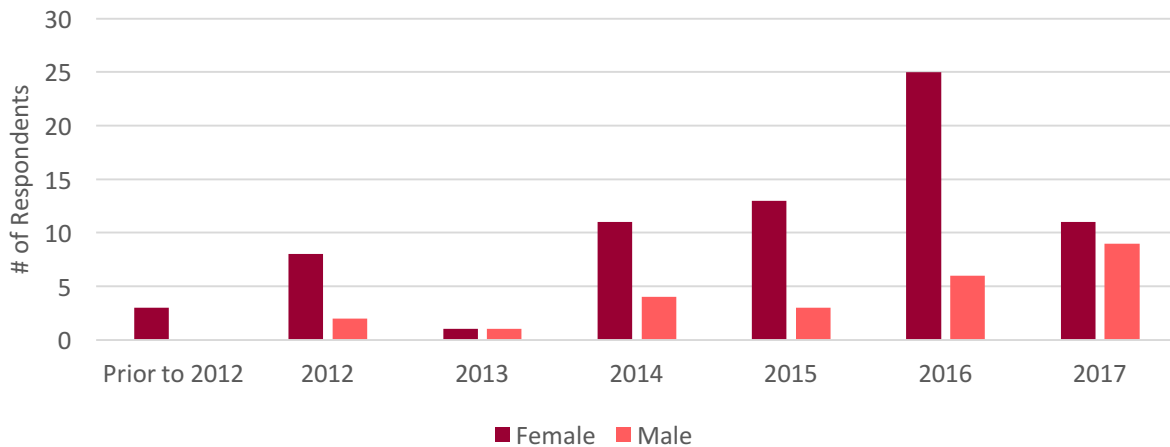


Figure 9: In what year was your most recent Parental Leave period initiated?

7. Access to Parental Leave Information

Understanding of support available to WSU Staff with caring responsibilities

Understanding of support with respect to caring responsibilities was ascertained by asking for agreement on a five-point scale (n=97).

[Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: "I have a good understanding of the support available to Western Sydney University staff with respect to their caring responsibilities"]

| | Strongly agree n (%) | Agree n (%) | Neither agree nor disagree n (%) | Disagree n (%) | Strongly disagree n (%) |
|--|-------------------------|------------------|---|-------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Professional (n= 64)</i> | 33 (34) | 21 (21.6) | 5 (5.2) | 4 (4.1) | 1 (1.0) |
| <i>Academic (n = 33)</i> | 7 (7.2) | 8 (8.3) | 8 (8.3) | 10 (10.3) | 0 |
| <i>Other Division (n = 41)</i> | 23 (23.7) | 14 (14.4) | 2 (2.1) | 2 (2.1) | 0 |
| <i>STEMM School/Institute (n=36)</i> | 9 (9.3) | 7 (7.2) | 9 (9.3) | 10 (10.3) | 1 |
| <i>Non-STEMM School/Institute (n=14)</i> | 4 (4.1) | 6 (6.2) | 2 (2.1) | 2 (2.1) | 0 |
| <i>[Not reported n = 6]</i> | | | | | |
| <i>Casual (n = 2)</i> | 1 (1.0) | 0 | 1 (1.0) | 0 | 0 |
| <i>Fixed term (n = 22)</i> | 7 (7.2) | 4 (4.1) | 7 (7.2) | 3 (3.1) | 1 (1.0) |
| <i>Ongoing (n = 72)</i> | 32 (33.0) | 24 (24.7) | 5 (5.2) | 11 | 0 |
| <i>Combined fixed/permanent PT (n = 1)</i> | 0 | 1 (1.0) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| <i>Female (n = 72)</i> | 35 (36.1) | 23 (23.7) | 9 (9.3) | 5 (5.2) | 0 |
| <i>Male (n = 25)</i> | 5 (5.2) | 6 (6.2) | 4 (4.1) | 9 (9.3) | 1 (1.0) |
| <i>All Respondents (n = 97)</i> | 40 (41.2) | 29 (29.9) | 13 (13.4) | 14 (14.4) | 1 (1.0) |

Table 1: Understanding of support for caring responsibilities

Overall, more than two thirds (71.1%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had a good understanding of the support available to WSU staff with caring responsibilities. However, employment type and division of employment correlated with understanding of support available, with less than half (46.9%) of academic staff indicating a good understanding compared to 86.8% of professional/technical staff, and with only 45.7% of staff employed in STEMM Schools/Institutes reporting a good understanding compared to 71.4% of non-STEMM and 90.2% of staff working in other divisions. There was no significant association between employment status and level of understanding. Gender was also significantly associated with level of understanding, with 81% of females agreeing or strongly agreeing that they had a good understanding compared to only 44% of male employees.

First point-of-access to information

Staff were asked where they accessed information about Parental Leave entitlements when they first discovered they were becoming a parent or carer. There were no significant associations between where information was accessed and academic vs. professional employment type, STEMM vs. non-STEMM, gender, or employment status.

[When you first discovered that you were becoming a parent or carer, where did you access information about your Parental Leave entitlements? (Select all that apply)]

| Source | n | % of overall sample |
|--------------------------------|-----------|---------------------|
| WSU Policy | | |
| Enterprise Agreement | 55 | 56.7 |
| Policy DDS | 10 | 10.3 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>65</i> | <i>67.0</i> |
| General WSU Online | | |
| HR Services | 25 | 25.7 |
| Office of Equity and Diversity | 3 | 3.1 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>28</i> | <i>28.9</i> |
| Direct Contact | | |
| HR Advisor | 31 | 32.0 |
| Supervisor/Manager | 24 | 24.7 |
| Office of Equity and Diversity | 1 | 1.0 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>56</i> | <i>57.7</i> |
| Other | | |
| Colleagues | 5 | 5.2 |
| Union | 1 | 1.0 |
| School Administrator | 1 | 1.0 |
| Government Website | 1 | 1.0 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>8</i> | <i>8.3</i> |
| Multiple sources | | |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>30</i> | <i>30.9</i> |

Table 2: First source of information

WSU policy was the first point of advice about entitlements for approx. two thirds of staff, with just over half (56.7%) of respondents accessing Enterprise Agreements, and a further 10% seeking policy guidelines on Policy DDS. Direct contact with HR was the second-most popular first point of access to entitlement information, with one third (32%) of respondents relying on HR Advisors for accurate advice. Seeking online information from HR Services and pursuing direct contact with supervisors and managers were also common approaches to determining entitlements, with roughly one quarter of all

respondents turning to these avenues. These rates of access to policy, online information, and key staff highlight the need for accurate and up-to-date information to be available through these avenues.

Ease/difficulty determining entitlements

Respondents were asked how difficult it was for them to determine what their individual parental leave entitlements were. Encouragingly, two thirds (67%) of respondents reported that determining their parental leave entitlements was either “extremely easy” or “somewhat easy”. Only 14% of respondents reported difficulty in this respect. There were no significant associations between declared difficulty in determining entitlements and employment type, division of employment, gender, or employment status. Each of the 14 staff members who experienced some or significant difficulties in determining their entitlements were either fixed term (n = 3) or ongoing staff (n = 11), and all experienced their difficulties in 2016 or 2017.

In open-text responses, staff indicated concern over:

- confusion over entitlements
- fixed start leave dates for maternity leave (requiring accurate prediction of birth date)
- delays in leave approvals, incl. relaying impact on Centrelink processes
- calculating leave (current calendar does not account for public holidays)
- inefficiency of paper-based leave application form
- timing of handovers to/from maternity cover staff
- impossibility of completing workload before commencing parental leave

Recommendations to improve support are included in the final section of this document.

Familiarity with online resources for expectant parents and carers

Staff were asked how familiar they were with WSU’s online resources for expectant parents and carers (Figure 6), with weblinks provided to each resource. Discouragingly, a large proportion of staff were “not at all familiar” with three of the key resources listed: “Supporting Parents Toolkit for Staff” (78%), “Parenting Support” (84%), and “Managing Family Responsibilities” (79%). Recentness of or repeated access to parental leave did not affect responses, with no improvement in familiarity noted for those who accessed parental leave in 2016 or 2017. Those who accessed parental leave on multiple occasions over the relevant period also showed no improvement in familiarity with these resources.

Greater familiarity was displayed for HR’s “Your Leave” and “Flexible Work Options” online web resources, with 62.5% and 55.2% of respondents indicating that they were either “very” or “somewhat” familiar (respectively). However, a marked difference of familiarity with the “Flexible Work Options” resource existed within employment type, with academic staff less likely to be familiar (58% “not at all familiar”) compared with professional staff (38% “not at all familiar”). Of those academic staff unfamiliar with the resource, the majority (63%) had already returned to work.

No other significant associations were found between familiarity of each online resource listed and academic vs. professional type, STEMM vs. non-STEMM based staff member, gender, or employment status.

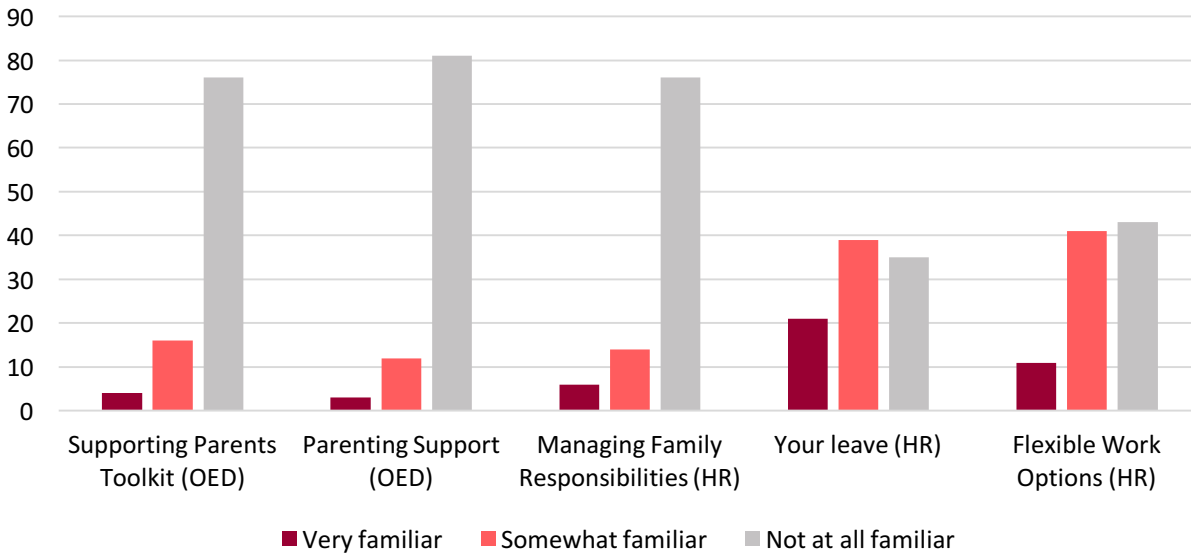


Figure 6: How familiar are you with WSU’s following online resources for expecting parents and carers?

8. Parental Leave Experiences: Satisfaction Overview

Satisfaction with parental leave entitlements and support was ascertained by asking for agreement on a five-point scale (n=97 respondents). Two general statements were proposed:

- i. “I am satisfied with the Parental Leave options available to Western Sydney University staff”
- ii. “My immediate supervisor/manager is responsive to my needs when I have caring responsibilities”

Satisfaction with Parental Leave options

[Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: “I am satisfied with the Parental Leave options available to Western Sydney University staff”]

| | Strongly agree n (%) | Somewhat agree n (%) | Neither agree nor disagree n (%) | Somewhat disagree n (%) | Strongly disagree n (%) |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Professional (n= 64) | 47 (48.5) | 11 (11.3) | 3 (3.1) | 3 (3.1) | 0 |
| Academic (n = 33) | 12 (13.4) | 10 (10.3) | 6 (6.2) | 2 (2.1) | 3 (3.1) |
| Other Division (n = 41) | 32 (33.0) | 5 (5.2) | 1 (1.0) | 3 (3.1) | 0 |

| | | | | | |
|---|------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| <i>STEMM School/Institute (n=36)</i> | 15 (15.5) | 9 (9.3) | 8 (8.2) | 2 (2.1) | 2 (2.1) |
| <i>Non-STEMM School/Institute (n=14)</i> <i>[Not reported n = 6]</i> | 9 (9.3) | 4 (4.1) | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Casual (n = 2)</i> | 1 (1.0) | 1 (1.0) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| <i>Fixed term (n = 22)</i> | 10 (10.3) | 6 (6.2) | 2 (2.1) | 2 (2.1) | 2 (2.1) |
| <i>Ongoing (n = 72)</i> | 48 (49.5) | 13 (13.4) | 7 (7.2) | 3 (3.1) | 1 (1.0) |
| <i>Combined fixed/permanent PT (n = 1)</i> | 0 | 1 (1.0) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| <i>Female (n = 72)</i> | 54 (55.7) | 13 (13.4) | 2 (2.1) | 3 (3.1) | 0 |
| <i>Male (n = 25)</i> | 5 (5.2) | 8 (8.3) | 7 (7.2) | 2 (2.1) | 3 (3.1) |
| <i>All respondents (n = 97)</i> | 59 (60.8) | 21 (21.6) | 9 (9.3) | 5 (5.2) | 3 (3.1) |

Table 3: Satisfaction with Parental Leave options

Overall, 82.5% of the sample indicated they agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the Parental Leave entitlements available to Western Sydney University staff (Table 2). However, employment type was associated with satisfaction, with only 66.7% of academic staff agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement compared with approx. 90% of professional staff.

Division where employed was also associated with entitlement satisfaction with only 66.7% of respondents employed in STEMM Schools/Institutes reporting satisfaction (agree/strongly agree) compared with more than 90% of respondents employed in non-STEMM or other divisions.

A lower proportion (72.7%) of fixed term employees reported satisfaction with entitlements (agreed/disagreed) than ongoing staff (84.7%). While the sample of casual staff is very small (n=2), both casual respondents (100%) reported that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Gender and leave type held the strongest associations with satisfaction with WSU parental leave entitlements, with 93% of females and those who accessed maternity leave agreeing or strongly agreeing that they were satisfied, compared with only 52% of males and 50% of those accessing partner leave. Approx. 20% of males/those accessing partner leave expressed dissatisfaction (disagreed/strongly disagreed) with the statement.

Overall satisfaction with supervisor/manager support

Impressively, 74.2% of all respondents strongly agreed with the statement that their “immediate supervisor/manager is responsive to [their] needs when [they] have caring responsibilities”, with a further 19% noting broad agreement with the statement. There were no associations between stated agreement and gender, division of employment, or employment type (academic/professional). An association was identified, however, between employment status and this statement, with 73.4% of ongoing staff in strong or broad agreement vs. 90.9% of fixed term employees.

Satisfaction with support prior to taking parental leave

Respondents were asked to rate how satisfied they were with the support they received from HR, senior management, local administration, their supervisor/manager, local colleagues (e.g. department, institute or unit) and broader colleagues (e.g. school or division) prior to taking leave. Encouragingly, 62% of all respondents were extremely satisfied with the support they received from their supervisor/manager with 55% extremely satisfied with the support they received from their immediate colleagues (Figure 7). No category exceeded an 8.5% rate of dissatisfaction from any combination of respondents.

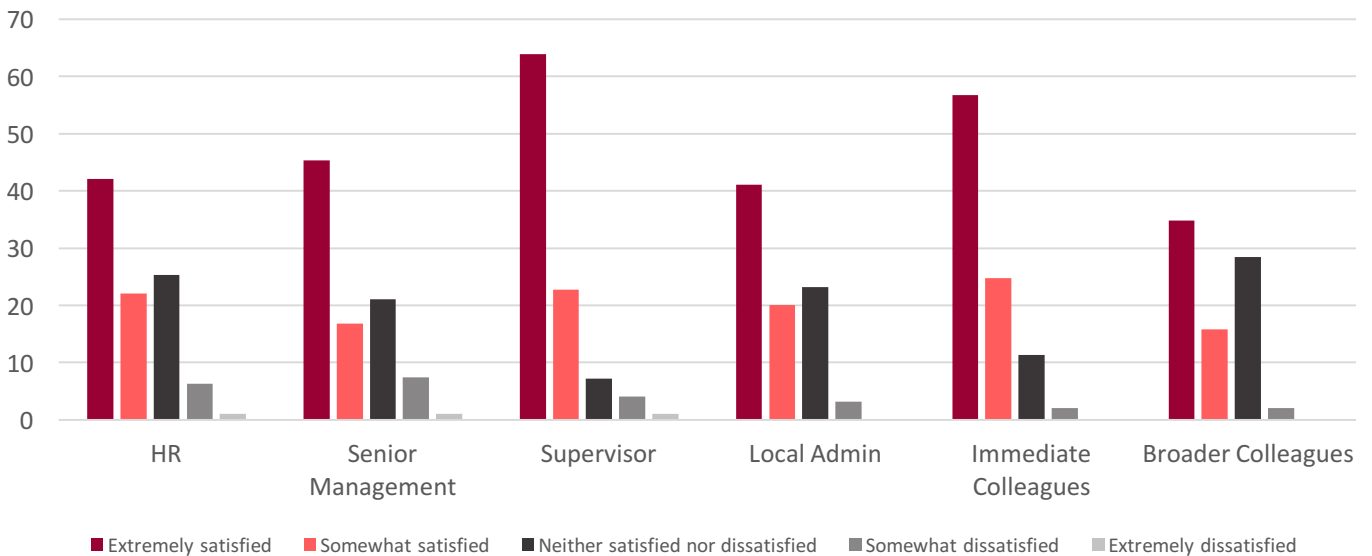


Figure 7: Before taking Parental Leave, how satisfied were you with the support provided by ... ?

Satisfaction with support after taking Parental Leave

Respondents were also asked to rate how satisfied they were with the support they received from HR, senior management, local administration, their supervisor/manager, local colleagues (e.g. department, institute or unit) and broader colleagues (e.g. school or division) after taking leave. The proportion of respondents who were extremely satisfied with all support points across all responses decreased slightly from responses prior to leave, down from 47.9% to 43.6% after leave (Figure 8). This overall reduction in satisfaction was largely due to the significant decrease in levels of high satisfaction with supervisor/manager support, dropping from 62.0% prior to leave to 48.0% after leave.

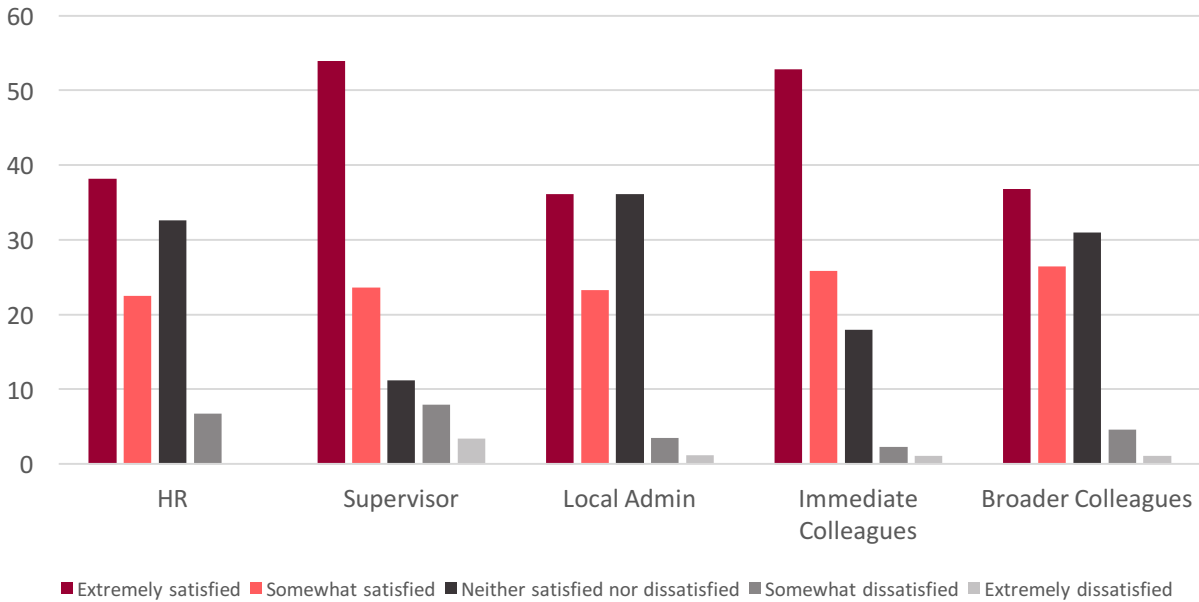


Figure 8: After completing your Parental Leave, how satisfied were you with the support provided by ... ?

Employment status was significantly associated with satisfaction with supervisor/manager on return to work, with more than twice as many (12%) of ongoing employees either somewhat or extremely dissatisfied when compared to fixed term employees (5.6%). Academic vs. professional employment was also significantly associated with satisfaction with immediate colleagues at their return to work: only 54.8% of academic staff were extremely or somewhat satisfied compared with 88.6% of professional.

9. Detailed Experiences: Before and During Leave

Difficulties while preparing for parental leave

Encouragingly, over 83% of respondents did not experience any difficulties when preparing to commence their parental leave. Further, there were also no significant associations with employment type, division of employment, gender, or employment status.

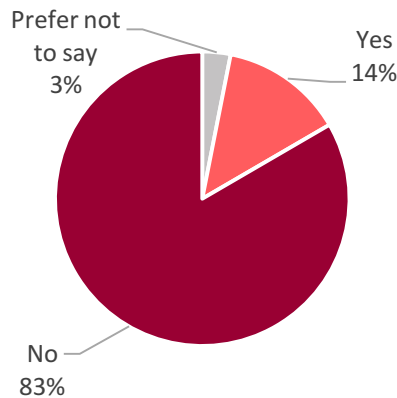


Figure 9: Did you experience any difficulties at work when preparing to take parental leave?

Those staff who did experience difficulties referred in open-text responses to HR issues already identified in the ‘difficulties accessing entitlements’ section of this report.

Contact with University while on leave

Respondents were asked how often they stayed in touch with WSU while on parental leave. A clear correlation was evident for those who took less leave, with those whose cumulative leave totalled less than 20 weeks most likely to keep in touch at least once per week (65.5%). Those whose leave totalled greater than 20 weeks were more likely to keep in contact once or twice per month (51.7% for those on leave for 21-52 weeks; 56.6% for those on leave 1-2 years; 87.5% for those on leave 2+ years). Those on leave for 21-52 weeks were most likely (31.3%) to keep in touch less often than once per month.

Academics were also far more likely to keep in touch more regularly, with 60.6% in touch on a weekly basis compared to 14.5% of professional staff, 33.3% once or twice per month (compared with 46.5% of professional staff) and only 6.1% less than once per month (compared with 29.0% of professional staff). This is partially but not wholly accounted for by academic respondents’ tendency to take less leave than professional respondents.

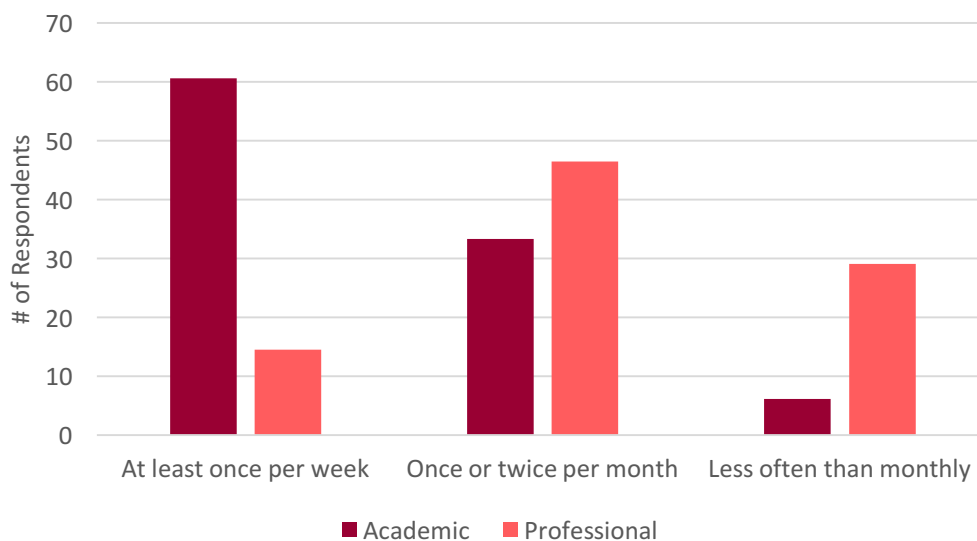


Figure 10. During your Parental Leave, approx. how often did you stay in touch with WSU?

Motivations for contact

Male staff were far more likely (58.3%) to maintain contact with the university to “keep on top of [their] workload” compared with female staff (21.1%). Academic staff were also considerably more likely to maintain contact for this reason (29.2%) compared with professional staff (6.3%). Accordingly, male academic staff were most likely to keep in touch with the university in order to manage workload (39.1%). This may well be associated with the consistent brevity (6 weeks or less) of male academic parental leave breaks.

In open-text responses, staff report maintaining contact in order to continue many forms of work:

- Offering advice to maternity cover position
- Handovers after leave commenced; handovers before leave complete
- HR arrangements (renewing contracts, organise return dates)
- Managing emails
- HDR Supervision
- Management of research lab
- Scholarly work, particularly publishing

Female staff were more likely to maintain contact to “maintain relationships with colleagues” (64.8%) and for “social or other personal reasons” (28.2%) compared with men (33.3% and 4.2% respectively). Professional staff were also more likely to maintain contact for this reason (32.3%) compared with academic staff (18.1%).

Ideal regularity of contact

Just over three quarters (76.0%) of respondents were either “extremely” or “somewhat” satisfied with the regularity of contact with the University while on leave. Those who kept in touch with the university once or twice per month were far more likely to be content with the level of contact, with 54.3% “extremely satisfied”, compared with 37.9% of those who kept in contact more often and 35% of those less often. Predictably, those who kept in touch more often were also more likely to express dissatisfaction with “too much contact” (48.3) compared with other categories (21.7% for monthly, 5% for more than monthly). Similarly, those who made contact less often than monthly were more likely to complain of “not enough contact” (35%) compared with monthly contact (15%) and weekly contact (0%). These figures suggest the preferred regularity of contact between staff on parental leave and the university is once or twice per month.

However, academics were disproportionately more likely to be dissatisfied with “too much contact”, even when adjusted for brevity of leave, with 45.5% of academic staff in touch once or twice per month dissatisfied with the volume. Though the sample size was small, male staff who kept in touch once or twice per month are also more likely to be dissatisfied with “too much contact”, though this is likely attributable to their brevity of leave. Nonetheless, zero academic staff and zero males complained of “not enough contact”, regardless of their regularity in keeping in touch. It should be noted, then, that while once or twice per month may be a commonly favoured degree of contact with the university while on leave, all staff on parental leave should have control over their regularity of engagement with the University.

Recommendations regarding contact with staff while on parental leave are included in the final section of this document.

Keep in Touch Program

43.6% of all respondents stated that they would be “likely” or “very likely” to participate in a ‘Keep in Touch’ program. Unsurprisingly, satisfaction with contact in previous experiences was a good predictor of interest in this program, with those who complained of “too much contact” least likely to participate (28%) and those who expressed “not enough contact” (78.5%). Female academics and male professional staff were least likely to participate, with 52.6% and 60% (respectively) rating participation either “unlikely” or “very unlikely”. By contrast, a strong number (59.6%) of female professionals were likely or very to participate.

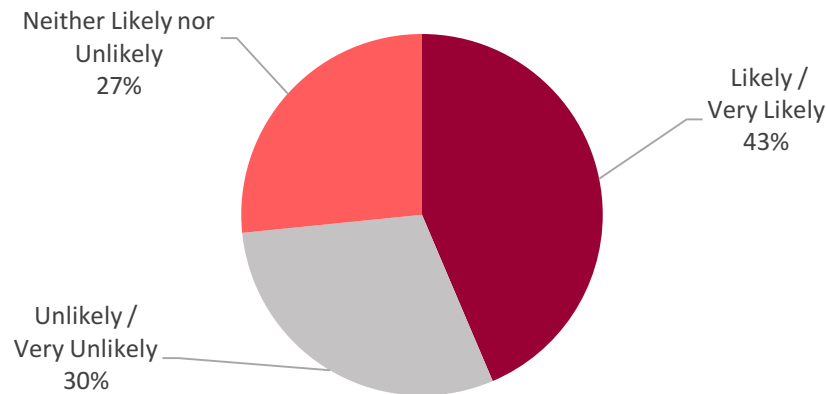


Figure 11. How likely would you be/have been to utilise a ‘keep in touch’ program while on Parental Leave?

10. Detailed Experiences: Returning to Work

The vast majority (91.8%) of respondents had returned to work before completing the survey. Those who had not yet returned to work were diverted to the final portion of the survey. Only respondents who had returned to work were able to view the following questions.

10.1. Flexible Work for Parents and Carers at WSU

Continuing carer needs to be away from work

Of those respondents who have returned to work, 70.8% cited a continuing need to be away from work during business hours to tend to caring responsibilities at least once per month, with only 29.2% experiencing this need less frequently than once per month. One quarter of respondents (25.8%) reported a need to be away from work on a regular basis (at least once per week). Interestingly, male staff were more likely to need to be away from work to tend to caring responsibilities at least once per month, with 82.6% citing this need compared with 66.7% of female staff. This may be connected to lower rates of access to flexible work options for male staff compared to female staff (see below).

Uptake of flexible work options

Those respondents who had returned to work were asked to indicate which, if any, flexible work options they have since accessed. Of those staff who had returned to work:

- A sizeable portion (41.6%) have worked from home to accommodate caring responsibilities
- A sizeable portion (43.8%) have accessed flexible start/finish times
- Almost one third (30.3%) have worked part-time
- A total of 6.7% of staff have worked a compressed work week
- A small number (4.5%) have participated in a job share arrangement
- Roughly three quarters (69.2%) of eligible staff accessed a Flexible Return to Work option
- A small number (4.5%) of eligible staff purchased additional leave.

These results were further analysed by gender, by employment type, and by employment status. Significant results are detailed below.

Flexible work by gender

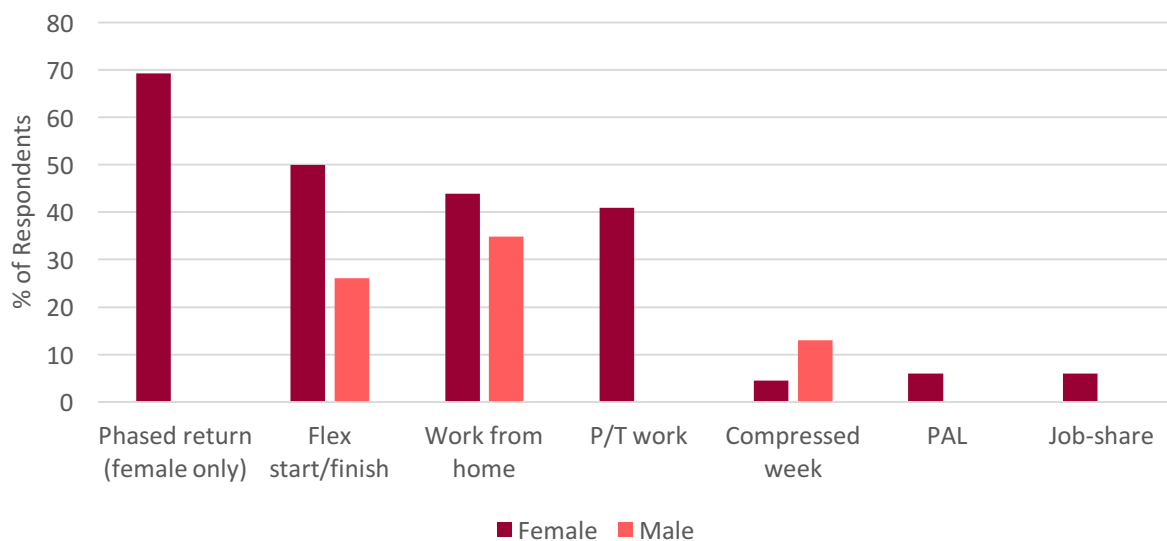


Figure 12. Gender analysis: On your return to work, have you accessed ... ? (select all that apply)

When analysed by gender, the results demonstrated that:

- Women were somewhat more likely to work from home (43.9% compared with 34.8% of men).
- Females are twice as likely to access flexible start/finish times (50%) than males (26.1%).
- All (100%) respondents who worked part time after returning from maternity leave were female, none of them male.
- Male staff were almost three times as likely (13%) to have worked a compressed work week compared with female staff (4.5%)
- All (100%) of respondents who participated in a job share arrangement were female, none of them male.

- 6% of females and zero males have used the Purchased Additional Leave (PAL) scheme.
- The Flexible Return to Work option is directly associated with Maternity Leave and therefore not available to male staff. Roughly three quarters (69.2%) of females who accessed maternity leave have also accessed a Flexible Return to Work option.
- With the exception of a compressed working week, male staff were less likely to access all flexible work options than female staff.

Flexible work by employment type and by employment status

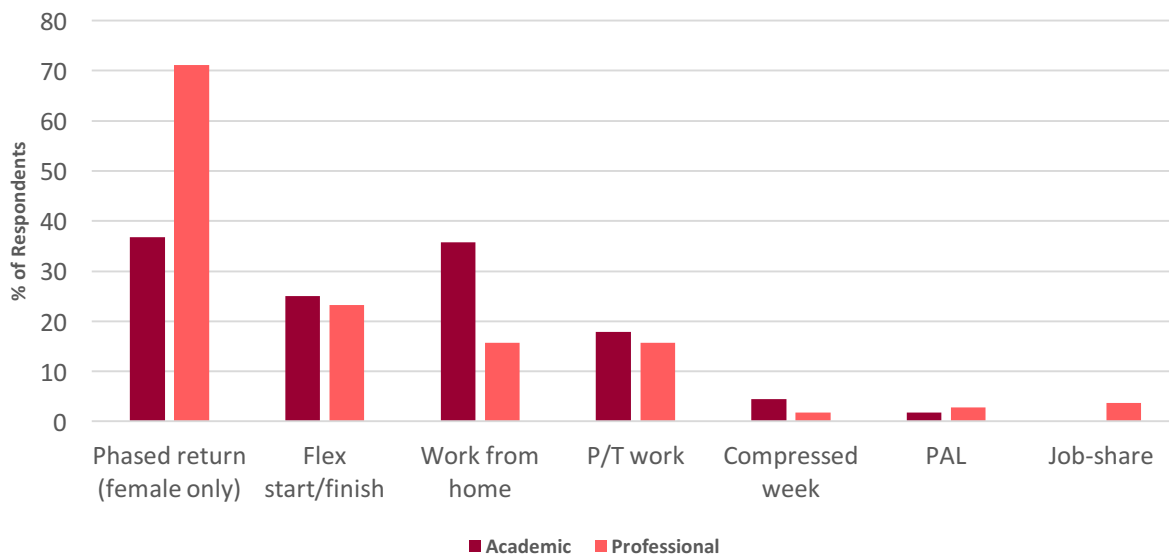


Figure 13. On your return to work, have you accessed ... ? (select all that apply) by employment type

When distributed by employment type, the results revealed that:

- Professional staff almost twice as likely (71.1%) than academic staff (36.8%) to access a Flexible Return to Work option.
- Academic staff were far more likely (60.6%) to work from home than professional staff (26.6%).
- Academic staff were four times as likely (12.1%) to have worked a compressed work week than professional staff (3.1%).
- 6% of female professional staff and zero academics participated in a job share arrangement.

Flexible work by employment status

When calculated according to employment status, the results illustrated that:

- Ongoing staff are somewhat more likely (70.2%) to access a Flexible Return to Work option than fixed term staff (61.9%). Perhaps unsurprisingly, full-time staff were far more likely (78.7%) to access a Flexible Return to Work option than part-time staff (47.8%).
- Employment status had only marginal bearing on working from home, with somewhat more full-time staff (55.3%) engaging with this option compared with part-time staff (47.8%).

- Interestingly, part-time, fixed-term staff were the least likely to access Maternity Leave Flexible Return to Work options and the least likely to work from home but were most likely (80.0%) to coordinate flexible start/finish times.

Work from home frequency

Of those who cited working from home, more than half (54%) reported doing so at least one day per week. A small number (16.2%) worked from home semi-regularly (one or two days per month), and one third (29.7%) do so irregularly (less than once per month). Full-time staff (61.5%) were almost twice as likely to work from home on a regular basis as part time staff (36.4%).

Academic staff were far more likely (60.6%) to work from home than professional staff (26.6%), and more likely to work from home more often, with 60.0% doing so regularly compared with 47.1% of professional staff. Despite male staff being less likely to work from home overall, male and female staff were as likely to work from home on a regular basis.

10.2. Flexible work satisfaction

Satisfaction with flexible work conditions was ascertained by asking for agreement on a five-point scale (n=89). Staff were asked to rate their agreement with a series of questions relating to flexible work, including:

- i. “I have the flexibility I need to manage my work and personal life, including caring responsibilities”
- ii. “Flexible work is actively encouraged at Western Sydney University”
- iii. “My supervisor is supportive of requests for flexible working arrangements”
- iv. “My commitment to Western Sydney University would not be questioned if I chose to use flexible work options”
- v. “I feel that my School/Institute/Division offers those engaged in flexible work arrangements the same opportunities as those who are not”
- vi. “In this School/Institute/Division, people of all gender identities are offered the same opportunities to access flexible work options”

Encouragingly, 78.7% of all respondents agree or strongly agree that they “have the flexibility [they] need to manage [their] work and personal life, including caring responsibilities”, and 79.8% agree or strongly agree that their “supervisor is supportive of requests for flexible working arrangements”.

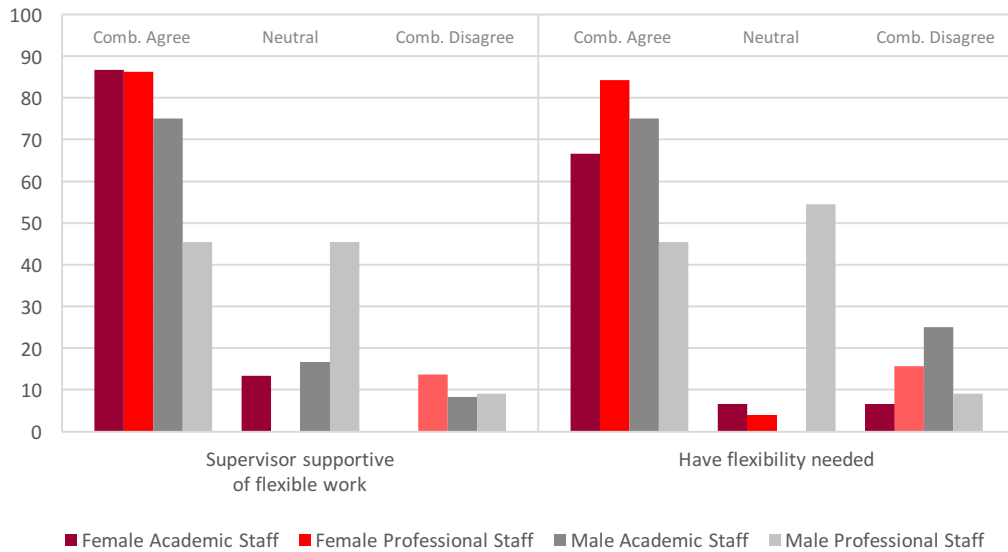


Figure 14. Feelings about flexible work conditions by gender and employment type, Part 1

Female staff feelings about options and support for personal workplace flexibility were largely positive, with the vast majority (84.9%) reporting agreeing that they “have the flexibility [they] need”, and a further 86.4% agreeing that their “supervisor is supportive of [their] requests”. Male academic staff rates of agreement are also strong, with 75% expressing satisfaction across both categories. However, male professional staff expressed the lowest rates of agreement that they “have the flexibility [they] need”, with less than half (45.5%) either agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement and the same number (45.5%) agreeing or strongly agreeing that their supervisor is supportive of their requests.

Flexibility of leave arrangements clearly benefit academic staff, with 82% agreeing or strongly agreeing that their arrangements are sufficiently flexible to manage important caring issues compared to 65% of professional staff expressing agreement.

Perception of flexible work encouragement (Barrier: Male Staff)

Only 52.8% of all respondents believe that “flexible work is actively encouraged at WSU”. This statement displayed a clear gender distinction, however, with 60.6% of female respondents in agreement compared with only 30.4% of males. A small distinction also exists at employment type, with academic staff somewhat less likely to agree with this statement than professional staff, at 44.4% and 56.5% agreement respectively. Female professional staff displayed the highest rates of agreement (62.7%), followed by female academic staff (53.3%). While professional males demonstrated the lowest rates of agreement (27.3%), academic males were most likely to actively oppose with the statement, with 41.6% either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that flexible work is encouraged at Western Sydney University.

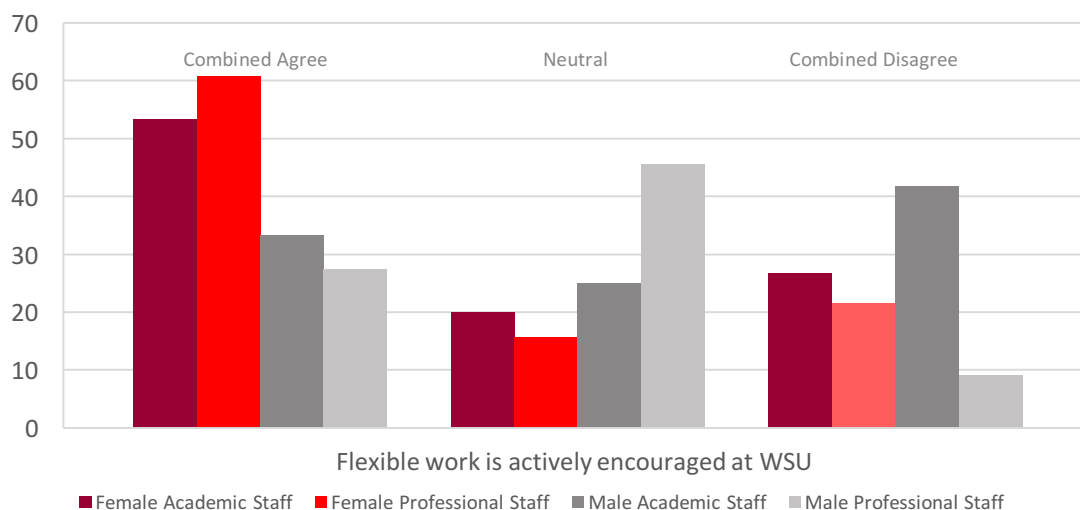


Figure 15. Feelings about flexible work encouragement by gender and employment type, Part 2

Equal access to flexible work (Barrier: All Staff)

Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the statement that “people of all gender identities are offered the same opportunities to access flexible work arrangements in their School/Division/Institute”. Only 40.9% of male respondents and 56.1% of females agree or strongly agree with this statement (total agreement = 52.3%), with only female professional staff in majority agreement (68.6%). By stark contrast, academic female staff agreed with this statement at rates of 13.3%, academic males at 33.3% and professional males at 45.5%.

Equal career opportunities for those engaged in flexible work (Barrier: Academic Staff)

Only 48.9% of respondents feel that their “School/Division/Institute offers staff engaged in flexible work arrangements the same opportunities as those who are not”, with significantly higher agreement from professional staff (58.1%, compared with 26.9% for academic staff). Despite their lack of agreement that flexible work is encouraged at WSU, male professional staff were the most confident of all groups that flexible work arrangements do not affect opportunity in their School/Institute/Division, with 63.9% agreeing or strongly agreeing that opportunities are distributed equally. While both male and female academics display low rates of agreement, academic female staff are most likely to actively oppose the statement, with 40% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that career opportunities are distributed equally.

Commitment to WSU questioned (speculative)

Despite lack of confidence that flexible work does not affect opportunities, only 31.8% of respondents believed their commitment to WSU would be questioned if they chose to access flexible work options. Interestingly, female staff were most assured that their commitment would indeed not be questioned, with 50.9% of professional females and 60.0% academic females actively disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement, compared with 27.3% for both professional and academic males.

For the majority of professional females, then, neither lack of opportunity nor perceived lack of commitment are risks associated with flexible work. For academic females, lack of opportunity related to flexible work is believed to exist but is not attributable to a perceived lack of commitment.

Open-text responses from participating staff revealed further concern over:

- expectations to fulfil full-time load while on PT arrangements
- varied support for flexible work arrangements (i.e., supervisor-dependent)
- informal flexible work arrangements common (because of above)
- confusion re: phased return to work entitlements
- perceived link between PT work arrangements and lack of promotion opportunity
- missed opportunities for training & development
- PT lack of access to university ballots – perceived as unfair punishment for PT arrangement
- “guilt” around not attending night events; some report reprimand

11. Difficulties Balancing Work & Carer Responsibilities

Despite positive reflection on personal circumstances regarding flexible work and supervisor support (as above), several challenges or negative perceptions around the relationship between work and caring responsibilities persisted for many respondents. Perceptions about adverse effects were ascertained by asking for agreement on a five-point scale (n=89). Staff were asked to rate their agreement with a series of questions relating to flexible work, including:

- i. “The expected workload at Western Sydney University makes it difficult to balance work and home responsibilities”
- ii. “My Parental Leave break(s) have adversely affected my career”
- iii. “Carer or family responsibilities impede career progression at Western Sydney University”

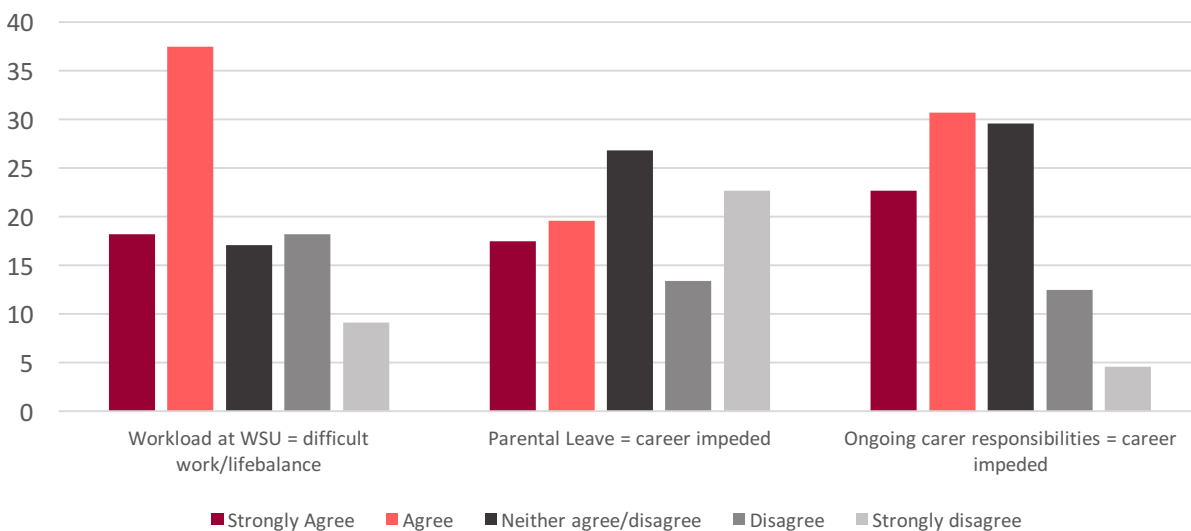


Figure 16. Correlations between caring responsibilities and/or flexible work and adverse career effects

Workload expectations and work/life balance (Barrier: Female Academic Staff)

More than half (55.7%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “the expected workload at Western Sydney University makes it difficult to balance work and home responsibilities”. A clear distinction between academic and professional opinion was displayed, with academic staff (70.3%) considerably more likely than professional staff (49.2%) to agree with this statement. Academic females were most likely to agree (80.0%), with professional females least likely to agree (46.0%).

Carer/Family Responsibilities as impediment to WSU Career (Barrier: Academic Staff)

Overall, 53.4% of respondents agree or strongly agree that “carer or family responsibilities impede career progression at WSU”, with significantly higher rates of agreement for academic staff (73.1%) compared to professional staff (45.2%). Female academics were most likely to identify an impediment (80%), and male professional staff were least likely (36.4%). These results mostly correspond to perceptions of opportunity around flexible work, cited above. Professional female staff, however, also display a majority agreement (68.6%) that carer/family responsibilities impede career progression at WSU, despite being satisfied that flexible work does not correlate with lack of opportunity or perceived lack of commitment.

Perceived adverse effects of parental leave breaks

Staff were also asked to rate their agreement on whether they felt their Parental Leave break(s) had adversely affected their career. Unsurprisingly, those who took parental leave breaks of greater cumulative length were more likely to perceive adverse career effects. This is reflected in a steady increase in proportion over time, with 16% of those who accessed less than 20 weeks of leave, 43.3% of those who accessed either 21–52 weeks or 1–2 years of parental leave, and 62.5% those who took 2 years or more in cumulative leave reporting adverse effects. A gender association with increased perception of adverse effects (45.8% female, 12% male) is at least partially explained by the length-of-leave correlation, with all responding males having accessed less than 20 weeks of parental leave. Sample sizes for females who accessed less than 20 weeks of parental leave were too small to make effective gender comparison in this group.

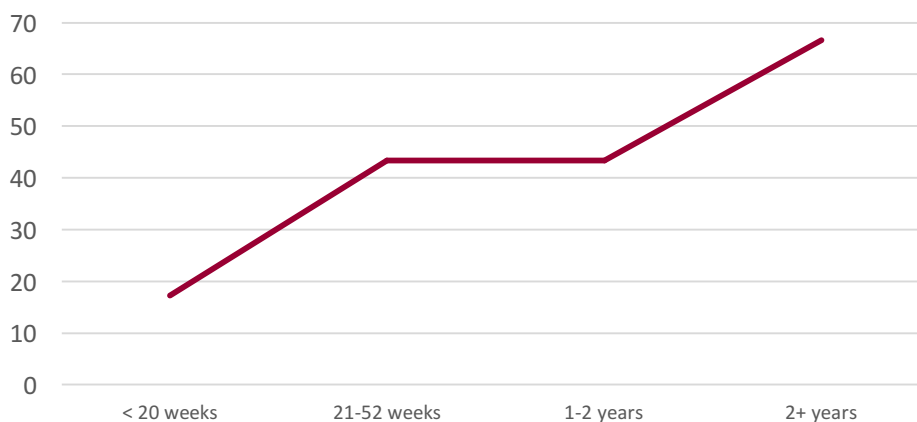


Figure 17. Adverse career effects directly correlate with length of parental leave

Missed career opportunities due to Parental Leave (Barrier: Female Academic Staff)

Participants were asked whether they “feel [they] have missed opportunities for promotion because of Parental Leave breaks or ongoing carer responsibilities”. Only 35% of all staff indicated that they agreed with the statement. Females were twice as likely (40.2%) compared with males (20%) to agree. Academic females were most likely to agree, with 63.2% identifying a correlation between parental leave and missed promotion compared with only 21.4% of male academics or 32.1% of female professional staff. The higher incidence of report from female academics is not explained by a length-of-leave correlation.

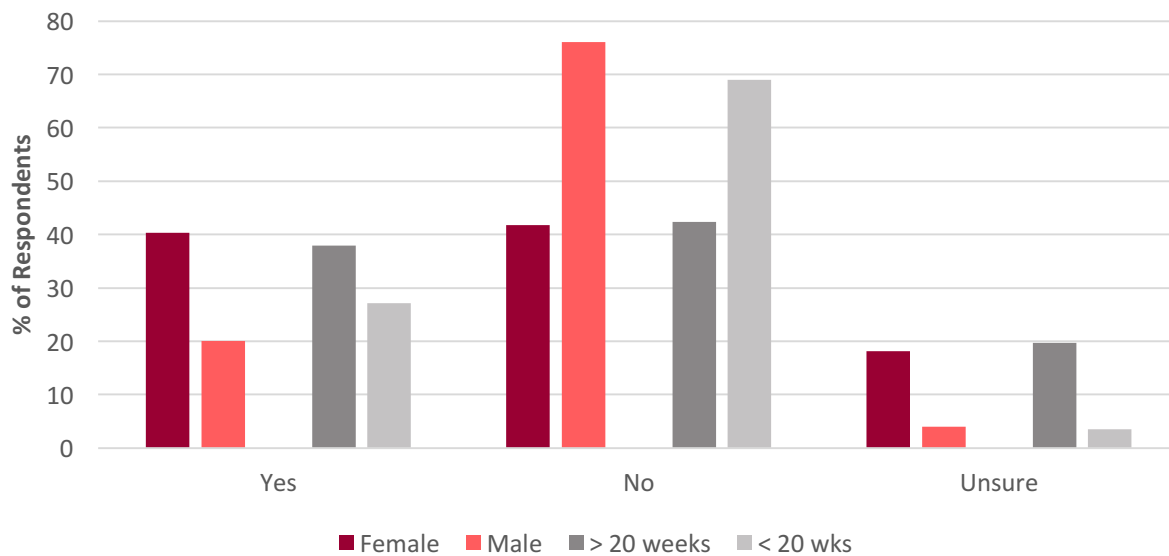


Figure 18. Perception of missed opportunities for promotion/higher appointment because of Parental Leave, by gender and by length of leave

Difficulties, discomfort and discrimination

Just under one third (31.46%) of respondents who have returned to work report “difficulties accessing or discomfort in asking for special personal leave, parental leave, flexible working hours”, with slightly more women (33.3%) reporting than men (26.1%). Academic and professional staff were equally likely to experience difficulty/discomfort.

Concerningly, 19.3% of staff report that they have “felt discriminated against within [their] School/Institute/Division because of [their] caring responsibilities” at some point, with academics twice as likely to report (29.6% compared with 14.8% for professionals). No significant gender difference is identified overall, however female academics are by far the most likely to report discrimination (40%), followed by male professionals (27.2%).

12. Satisfaction Overview: Sufficient Support for Parents and Carers

Staff were asked whether they “feel that Western Sydney University provides sufficient support for parents/carers”. Almost two thirds of all respondents agree with the statement, with only 19% in disagreement.

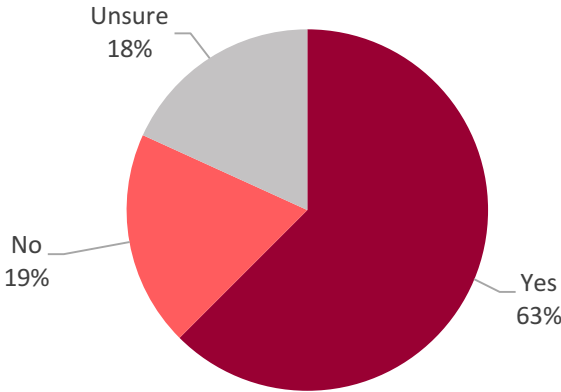


Figure 19. Do you feel that Western Sydney University provides sufficient support for parents/carers?

Satisfaction with overall support by gender

However, a clear gender association exists, with females twice as likely (72.2%) to agree than male staff (36.4%). Male staff were also more than three times as likely to actively oppose the statement (40.9%) compared with females (12.12). These associations may be at least partially explained by length-of-leave association, and may suggest that male staff are dissatisfied with the volume of partner leave available. Lower overall male satisfaction may also be attributable to lower rates of flexible work participation and greater perception that flexible work is not encouraged.

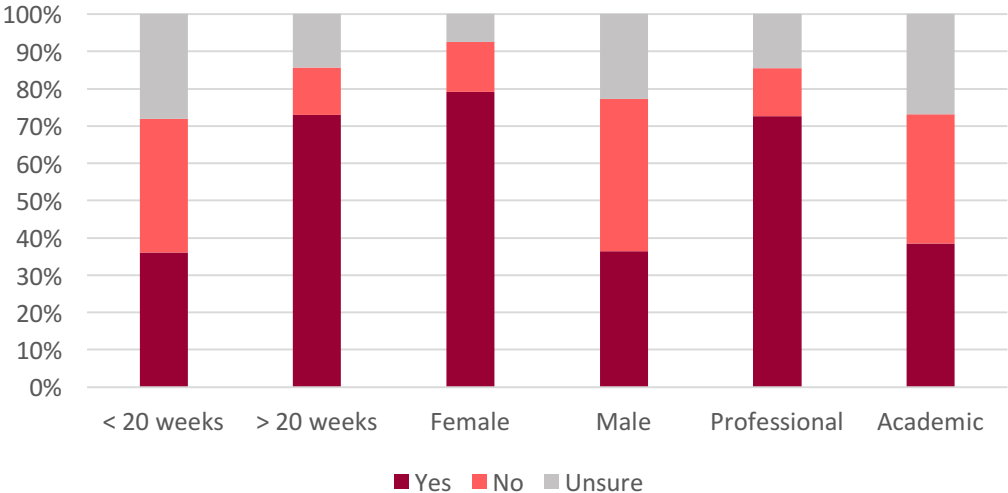


Figure 20: Feelings about sufficiency of support for parents/carers by length of leave, gender, and employment type

Satisfaction with overall support by employment type

Employment type also held association with likelihood to believe sufficient support is offered, with professional staff (72.6%) almost twice as likely to agree with the statement than academic staff (38.5%). This is consistent across gender groups, with female professional staff (78.3%) far more likely than female academics (46.7) and male professional staff (45.5%) far more likely than male academics (27.3%) to agree with the statement. Male academics were most likely to oppose the statement, answering “no” at a significantly higher rate (54.6%) than female academics (20.0%), male professional staff (27.3%) or female professional staff (9.8%).

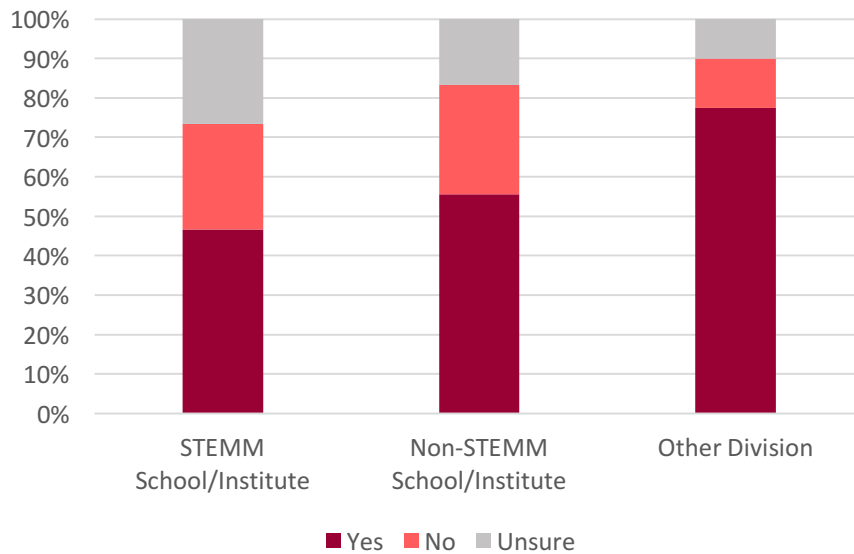


Figure 21: Feelings about sufficiency of support for parents/carers by division of employment

Satisfaction with overall support by division of employment

An association also exists for division of employment, with staff employed in STEMM or Non-STEMM Schools and Institutes less likely to agree with the statement than staff employed in Other Divisions. However, this correlation is most likely explained by the exclusive employment of female professional staff in Other Divisions, given that this group displays the highest rates of agreement. More analysis is required to confirm.