

**WESTERN SYDNEY**  
UNIVERSITY



**Vice-Chancellor's**  
**GENDER EQUALITY FUND**  
**Final Report 2019**

**Western Dads**

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## **Project Aims**

1. To work towards changing the perception of Dads internally as sole breadwinners to a more nuanced portrayal as caregivers
2. To understand the barriers and challenges for Dads in the workplace and make policy recommendations to enhance Dads experience and uptake of institutional supports designed to support them in work and family life

## **Key Outcomes**

1. 2020 Calendar showcasing WSU Dads drawn from the student, professional and academic cohort
2. Organised and delivered a well-attended event (including attendees from WGEA) designed to celebrate “Western Dads”
3. Best practice policy recommendations are made derived from extensive research into maternity, paternity, primary, secondary and parental leave globally and an audit of the WSU website.

## **Budget**

- \$5k was generously allocated to this project
- \$3,636.00 PO number 498761 was spent on printing
- \$882.50 for event
- Total spending was within budget

## **Actions Taken & Rationale**

1. A calendar was developed to portray Dads from the student, professional and academic cohort in a caregiving light. Our research found the perception of Dads as breadwinners and providers is a key barrier to the uptake of institutional support on behalf of Dads (O'Brien, 2012). The images have been so well received that the images of those Dads who provided permission may be used in future marketing campaigns. The calendar was distributed at the event and to anyone who requested copies afterwards via yammer. The balance of the 1,000 calendars printed was distributed by Katie Hayes with a cover letter from the research team and the diversity team. The cover letter explained the rationale behind the calendar and provided further information about the policy.
2. An event was organised at IPSQ in the lead up to Father’s Day to celebrate Western Dads and launch the calendar. The purpose of this event was to support the calendar by challenging the perception of father’s in the workplace. The event was well-attended by Senior people within the University and a researcher from the WGEA. This is important since our research has shown that active support by people in positions of leadership will encourage Dads to access institutional support offered (Roy & Dyson, 2010). The event was also promoted on yammer and SOB’s Facebook & WSU’s LinkedIn page (see appendices B for the stats and analysis).

Furthermore, the event did not follow the usual research seminar format. Instead two Dads who appeared in the calendar were invited to share their personal stories of becoming a father and how WSU had supported them in this. The event was opened by the Dean Prof Amir Mahmood who also shared his personal stories about being a father. Both “Western Dads” named the additional 6 weeks leave offered in the current

Enterprise Bargaining Agreement as lifechanging for them and expressed their gratitude to WSU for enabling them to be father's in a more meaningful way than they could have been without this leave.

3. A literature review was conducted to understand the challenges that are faced by organisations wishing to improve the uptake of parental leave by fathers and to benchmark the current policies and practices of WSU against best practice. It should first be acknowledged the leave offered by WSU to fathers is generous. In summation the key barriers to fathers taking up paternity leave are as follows:
  - Complicated and rigid policies (Lammi-Taskula, 2006)
  - Distinction made between maternity/paternity, primary/secondary caregiver (Gaunt, 2008)
  - Behaviour modelled by direct supervisor (McDonald, Pini & Bradley, 2007)
  - Persistence of “male-breadwinner” stereotype (Gregory & Milner, 2011)
  - Challenges in finding a replacement or operating with staff shortage if a replacement cannot be found for fathers on leave (Nordberg, 2019)
  - Managers discouraging male employees from taking leave by communicating the idea that “leave is a choice, not an expectation” (Haas & Hwang, 2019)
  - Masculine workplace norms (Brandth & Kvande, 2018).
4. An audit of the WSU website was conducted (see Appendices A). It is attached as a part of this report and demonstrates some gaps and areas for improvement in the communication of the existing policy.

# Key Recommendations

## *Short Term*

- Allow fathers to access the 2 weeks paternity leave anytime within the first year of their child's life
- Allow fathers to access the 6 weeks primary care giver leave anytime within the first two years of their child's life (Law firm Baker McKenzie who are leaders in equal access to parental leave offer their entitlements anytime in the first two years to promote uptake)
- Create a new parent fact sheet for Dads (similar to the one currently for Mums on the website) that in a simple way conveys the entitlements available and what is required to access them. This should be easy to find on the WSU website and distributed to all team leaders, promote on Yammer.
- Recruit advocates (Dads or others from HR or the Diversity team) who can attend meetings with team leaders to share the benefits of encouraging Dads to be active in family life by accessing parental leave or flexible working arrangements. These benefits are not limited to dads only, but also to their children families and surprisingly their workplace. Evidence suggests, for example, that men who take parental leave are healthier, and as a result are less likely to take sick leave or be absent from work, therefore benefiting their organisations (Lewis, Stumbitz, Miles, & Rouse, 2014).
- Masculine workplace norms may present a challenge for fathers when choosing to take parental leave. To overcome this issue, caring masculinity can be promoted to employees through regular events and social activities which involve their children. Research supports the development of caring masculinity through care responsibilities and highlight its rewards on men's mental health (Brandth & Kvande, 2018).

## *Long Term*

- Move to gender neutral parental leave by removing the distinction of paternity/maternity leave and status as primary/secondary caregiver and offer equal parental leave irrespective of the presence of another parent at home (ING & Diageo have both announced changing their policy to this joining the ranks of Medibank Private, Aviva, Spotify and Baker McKenzie)
- Parental leave policies to be discussed during the induction process. Include reporting on parental status of team members in all team leaders annual review. This is important in order for WSU to track and monitor uptake. Ensure all new parents are captured, along with explanation of whether institutional supports were accessed or not as a part of returning to work to set up employees for a successful transition.
- Consider implementing a buddy system whereby new parents are partnered with an "experienced parent" who may mentor them through the process of adjusting to a new style of working with increased family commitments
- Continue to support internal initiatives that encourage work life harmony for parents and challenge traditional stereotypes about caregivers.
- As fathers' leave taking is not the norm in organisations, even when policies allow for generous leave to be taken (Haas & Hwang, 2019), we should focus on changing the norms surrounding fathers leave taking to make it more normative in the workplace. This can be achieved by encouraging male team leaders and managers to take parental leave when eligible and to share this experience to showcase that a male worker does not have to conform to the constricting male breadwinner ideal. Better management

support and company encouragement can help promote parental leave taking for employed fathers (Haas & Hwang, 2019).

## **Limitations of the Research**

The project lead commenced maternity leave on the 13<sup>th</sup> of September, so the project needed to be condensed to fit this timeline. There is empirical data that has been captured as a part of this project, however the findings will be shared when the project lead returns to work after maternity leave.

## **Future Research**

- Map the experience of fathers in accessing entitlements in order to identify the points along the process where “failures” and “successes” occur in order to improve policy implementation.
- Expand the sample and seek out fathers who didn’t access entitlements to understand their experience, ensure the inclusion of parents in same-sex relationships or single parent households.
- Interview employees in team leadership roles to understand their attitudes towards parental leave and flexible work arrangements and their experience of the policy implementation process.

## **Special Thanks**

The research team would like to thank all those Dads who participated in the calendar, the research and the event. This project would not have been possible without them.

The Marketing and Communications team were extremely generous in donating their time and resources to this project. Without their support, this project would have been scaled back significantly to fit the budget. Special thanks to Sana Marroun, Simon Bosch, Sally Tsoutas and Kat Vanderwal.

Katie Hayes who provided assistance throughout in terms of moral support, distributing call outs to networks and mailing out the calendar – thank you so much!

Raymonda Aoun and Amita Chand were indispensable for organising the event. They went above and beyond in ensuring the morning was a success and even secured additional funding to provide a “exhibition” of the images at the entrance of the event (see image below). Melanie Young was also very helpful in promoting the event on Yammer and managing RSVPs.

The support of Prof Amir Mahmood & A/Prof Meg Smith added gravitas to the event and helped smooth out any institutional bumps encountered along the way. Much appreciated!

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# Appendices A - Audit of WSU Website

If one searches for paternity leave within the WSU website:

You are searching ALL WESTERN SYDNEY ▾

## paternity leave



The first result was open day:

### Open Day

<http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/openday>

Information on Open Day at Western Sydney University.

### Staff Benefits | Western Sydney University

[https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/employment/home/working\\_at\\_uws/staff\\_benefits](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/employment/home/working_at_uws/staff_benefits)

Purchased additional **leave** / Flexi-year scheme - Extra time for you to balance your work and life.  
... Paid parental **leave** (maternity, **paternity** and adoption) - 20 weeks paid maternity **leave**.

### Previous Alumni Award Winners | Western Sydney University

[https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/alumni/previous\\_winners](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/alumni/previous_winners)

William was elected to the NSW Teachers' Federation Executive Council 2002-2003 where he was instrumental in negotiating for the inclusion of **paternity leave** provisions in the award agreement, as well

I clicked on staff benefits:



# Staff Benefits

Western Sydney University is proud to offer a strong range of staff benefits. The list below list highlights just some of the many benefits you can learn more about at the [Staff Benefits](#) web page.

- ▶ **Flexible working hours**
- ▶ Flexible work arrangements are available to Professional and Academic staff. To find out more on each visit the [Professional Staff Agreement 2014 - 2017 \(PDF, 1384.84 KB\)](#) or [Academic Staff Agreement 2014 - 2017 \(PDF, 1334.55 KB\)](#). The University is committed to a balance between work and personal lives.
- ▶ [Salary sacrifice](#) - Novated leases (cars), computers, gym membership
- ▶ [Professional Development Scholarship](#) program (16 x \$2,500 scholarships)
- ▶ [Staff postgraduate study scholarships](#) - significantly reduced fees and study support to complete a Western Sydney University Postgraduate Coursework Degree
- ▶ The [Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Awards](#) program
- ▶ [Education support](#) - time off work and up to \$3000 a year towards your study
- ▶ Up to 24% superannuation
- ▶ [Staff Giving Program](#) - support a charity directly from your pay and reduce your taxable income
- ▶ Purchased additional leave / Flexi-year scheme - Extra time for you to balance your work and life
- ▶ Paid parental leave (maternity, paternity and adoption) - 20 weeks paid maternity leave
- ▶ [Organisational Development Unit](#) - provides in-house training courses and development to UWS staff
- ▶ Many discounts available through corporate and local business - Computer Hardware, Health, Leisure and many more... Visit the [Staff Benefits](#) page

***Western Sydney University is proud to have been awarded the Employer of Choice for Women Award by the Federal Government's Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) for nine consecutive years.***

Note that there is no link here for further information. Also that paternity leave is absent.

## Open Day

<http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/openday>

Information on Open Day at Western Sydney University.

## Staff Benefits | Western Sydney University

[https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/employment/home/working\\_at\\_uws/staff\\_benefits](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/employment/home/working_at_uws/staff_benefits)

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After searching for the supporting parents toolkit. I found this page:

# Parenting Support

Western Sydney University understands that in order to achieve gender equality it is important to provide a family friendly environment that supports staff and students with caring responsibilities.

The [Supporting Parents Toolkit for Staff \(PDF, 559.39 KB\)](#)  details the generous provisions and services that the University offers to staff who have parenting responsibilities. Included in the toolkit is checklist for staff and a checklist for supervisors and a summary of parental leave entitlements.



In addition to this comprehensive toolkit, and recognising the importance of supporting shared caring opportunities for our staff, a two page handout [Managing Family Responsibility - For Partners](#) has been developed to further highlight the provisions and services available to partners who have parenting responsibilities, including as primary carers.

More information is also available from the Office of Human resources via [Managing Family Responsibilities](#).

## Leave Provisions

The University has generous leave provisions available to support parents and adoptive/foster parents and partners including:

- ▶ Parental leave which includes maternity, foster care and adoptive parents leave
- ▶ Partner leave which includes Primary Carer leave for Partners
- ▶ Reduced hours return to work option after parental leave
- ▶ Flexible work options
- ▶ Personal Leave
- ▶ Purchase Additional Leave options.

More [leave information](#) is available from the Office of Human Resources.

## Staff Checklists

To be more inclusive, it might be worthwhile adding a checklist for Dads

# Staff Checklists

To assist staff in navigating the parental leave process the following two checklists have been developed:

- ▶ [Parental Leave Checklist for Staff](#)
- ▶ [Parental Leave Checklist of Supervisors](#)

Staff are encouraged to work through the checklist with their Manager/staff member to ensure a smooth transition.

## **Appendices B - Western Dads Event on Social Media**

### **Facebook – SOB**

Reach: 1,011

Engagements: 185

### **LinkedIn – Western**

Impressions: 20,841

Engagements: 2,010

“The posts have performed really well.

The LinkedIn post has been our best performing post in the last 30 days. The post has had the highest amount of impressions (20,841 - 30 day avg. was 8,783 impressions) and the highest engagement rate (9.64% - 30 day avg. was 2.85%).

On the SOB Facebook page, average impressions per post for the last 30 days has been 772 and this was post garnered 1,011. The average engagement rate for the last 30 days is 8.06%, and this post had an engagement rate of 13%.

All-in-all it performed better than our average benchmarking for each of the two channels it was posted on.” (Statistics and analysis was supplied by Joel Wakeham, Social Platforms Officer, Office of Marketing & Communications)

## **Links to Newspaper Stories on the topic of Father's & Parental Leave**

<https://parenting.nytimes.com/work-money/alexis-ohanian-paternity-leave>

<https://theconversation.com/fathers-days-increasing-the-daddy-quota-in-parental-leave-makes-everyone-happier-122047>

<https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life-and-relationships/children-who-play-with-their-dads-do-better-in-school-20190830-p52men.html>

<https://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace/work-family-conflict-on-the-rise-for-fathers-20190614-p51xr1.html>

<https://www.smh.com.au/business/workplace/paid-parental-leave-for-dads-a-key-to-narrowing-gender-pay-gap-20190820-p52iwl.html>

<https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/gender/fathers-who-want-to-engage-more-actively-often-encounter-barriers-20190731-p52cnm.html>

<https://www.quarterlyessay.com.au/essay/2019/09/men-at-work>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/10/world/europe/10iht-sweden.html?mtrref=www.google.com>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/04/opinion/sunday/men-parenting.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/15/opinion/sunday/fathers-day-parenting.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/16/well/family/dad-shaming-parenting-judgment.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/07/us/parents-fathers-role.html>

<https://theconversation.com/gender-equality-at-home-takes-a-hit-when-children-arrive-118420>

<https://theconversation.com/paid-family-leave-is-an-investment-in-public-health-not-a-handout-108323>

<https://theconversation.com/fathers-also-want-to-have-it-all-study-says-60910>

<https://theconversation.com/no-wonder-dads-arent-taking-shared-parental-leave-most-employers-have-failed-to-embrace-it-104290>