



GENOVATE

Transforming Organisational Culture for Gender Equality in Research and Innovation

RESEARCH NOTE: ACTION NO. 5. — ESTABLISH A CROSS UNIVERSITY WORKING GROUP ON MANAGING MATERNITY/FAMILY LEAVE.

INTRODUCTION

This research note summarises the results of GENOVATE's research on female academic and researcher experiences of taking maternity leave whilst employed in UCC. It includes background to the research, key findings from 42 respondents who took part in online survey interviews in July and September 2014 and a synopsis of international research.

BACKGROUND

As part of the UCC GENOVATE project and to help inform our gender equality action plans we were keen to hear from women academics and researchers who have taken maternity leave while employed by UCC. The questions were based on some of the information gathered by the GENOVATE team during focus groups in UCC in 2013; from relevant literature and from UCC leave policies.

Online qualitative interviews were undertaken in July 2014 and September 2014. The interview responses were anonymous and all data gathered is subject to the protocols on the collection and protection of data following the University College Cork Data Protection Policy and data protection legislation which governs the security accorded to both personal data and sensitive personal data.

KEY FINDINGS

These include:

- Most women were satisfied with how the administrative aspects of processing of statutory leave were managed. However, for research staff on funded contracts, there appears to be less clarity regarding leave entitlements;
- Lack of cover for maternity leave often

means the individual pregnant woman at local level is overly dependent on the unguaranteed informal benevolence and sympathy of line managers and colleagues and attitude of its Heads and managers in terms of support, workloads, attitudes;

- Evidence of support at local level is mitigated by broader institutional practices - such as not providing paid cover during periods of maternity leave or clear policies on best practice for handling maternity leave sensitively, for Heads, line managers and colleagues;

- The effects of cover not being provided often places the onus on women themselves who are taking maternity leave to either make or comply with arrangements to facilitate the high demands of departments and work areas even if those arrangements meant essentially working whilst on maternity leave – which several women reported doing – and doubling up on teaching before/after leave.

- A significant number of respondents expected that maternity leave would have a detrimental impact on their promotion/progression prospects and had direct experience of this.

- Impact on research activity is a major area of concern given the central role of research productivity in promotions processes within UCC;

- Ability to work flexibly for many is acknowledged as a possibility but many reported working longer hours than ever or cutting down



on breaks for lunch, working late at night in efforts to balance work and caring commitments;

- Provision of facilities for example for breastfeeding mothers, were reported as totally inadequate with profound difficulties in some cases.

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

A review of international literature shows that the intersection between domestic and academic spheres continues to be a key site of examination and discussion with regards to women's progression and advancement within academia.

Family formation affects both men and women's academic careers though 'plays a more dramatic role in women's careers' [1].

The impact of caring duties and responsibilities has a disproportionate effect on female academics [2], and '...institutional practices favour those without family responsibilities' [3].

Social and institutional structures within academia have effectively divested themselves of the necessity to deal with issues, such as maternity leave, which are often conceptualised as a female issue or problem [4].

'An academic career is basically competitive' and 'is pyramidal in structure and is predicated primarily on achievement in research'. Time out of such an intense environment has implications for promotion and progression [5].

For female researchers, taking maternity leave can have major repercussions not only on career prospects but their continued ability to earn a livelihood [6].

Women tend to have less linear career paths and more career breaks than men; therefore research assessment processes that prioritise sustained high-level outputs over a career,

and that do not take career breaks into account in a meaningful way, disadvantage women [7,8].

University systems cannot be deemed meritocratic as long as prevailing attitudes on parenthood discriminate against mothers, unconscious bias remains unchallenged and women continue '...to meet stumbling blocks that their male colleagues don't.' [9].

ENDNOTES:

[1] Mason, M.A., Wolfinger, N.H., Goulden, M. (2013) *Do babies matter: gender and family in the Ivory Tower*, New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA; London, UK: Rutgers University Press. (p.1)

[2] Grummell, B., Devine, D. & Lynch, K. (2009) *The care-less manager: gender, care and new managerialism in higher education*, *Gender and Education*, 21:2, 191-208, DOI: 10.1080/09540250802392273

[3] Baker, M. (2008) 'The Family Life of Academics: Gendered Priorities and Institutional Constraints', Prepared for the Annual Conference of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne. 9-11 July 2008.

[4] Byrne, A. and Keher, N (1995) *Academics Don't Have Babies! Maternity Leave Amongst Female Academics*, Dublin: Irish Federation of University Teachers. http://www.ucc.ie/publications/hecu/womenstf/8_keher.htm# [1]

[5] Wright, B. (2002) 'Women Academics and Promotion' Available at: www.tcd.ie/.../2002%20Women%20Academics%20and%20Promotions (p.7)

[6] Jacobson, K. (2013) 'Six steps to fairer funding for female scientists', *The Conversation*, 23 October 2013 Available at: <http://theconversation.com/six-steps-to-fairer-funding-for-female-scientists-16895>

[7] Doherty, L. and Cooke, A. (2011) *The Report of the Working Group on Academic Career Advancement in NUI Galway*, Galway: NUI Galway. Available at: http://www.nuigalway.ie/equality/documents/report_of_the_working_group_on_academic_career_advancement.pdf

[8] Zalewski, A., Tobbell, R. and Butcher, J. (2009) 'Female Attrition, Retention and Barriers to Careers in SET Academic Research', *The UKRC Report*, 8 December 2009 Available at: http://www.wisecampaign.org.uk/files/useruploads/files/resources/female_attrition_retention_and_barriers_to_careers_report_08_12_09.pdf

[9] Rice, C. (2012) '6 steps to gender equality and more 6 and more essays about how every university can get more women to the top and why they should', Available at: <http://curt-rice.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/6-Steps-to-Gender-Equality1.pdf> (p.18).