

Keele Academic Returners' Fund

Guidance Notes

1. Introduction

Through maternity and adoption cover, and the Academic Returners' Fund, Keele aims to create a working environment, for maternity and adoption returners, which encourages excellence in both research and scholarship and allows individuals to flourish professionally, thus benefitting the University.

University of Keele research- or scholarship-active academic staff, who expect to return from Maternity¹ or Adoption Leave² (as the primary adopter), are eligible to apply for additional support to minimise the impact of extended leave on research or scholarship activities.

The project is part of the Keele Athena Swan action plan and may help us to reduce the gender pay gap amongst academic staff³. It is envisaged that most applicants to the Academic Returners' Fund will be women and that the fund will help improve the representation of women at senior lecturer (target 50% female by 2021) and professorial level (target 35% female by 2021). The applicant will be able to request up to a maximum of £3300 funding. This additional support may be used during the period of leave or upon return to work. Some examples of the way it may be used are:

- to support teaching cover, once the member of staff has returned from leave, in order that more time can be dedicated to research or scholarship.
- to support other activities that enable research or scholarship e.g. administrative or technical assistance, attendance at conferences, training or small equipment purchase.

The fund is not to be used to cover teaching during the maternity/adoption leave period itself. It is the Head of School's responsibility to ensure that essential duties of the staff member are covered during maternity leave in accordance with the guidance note issued in May 2017 (see Annex 1). If the fund is to be used by the returning member of staff themselves during the period of maternity /adoption leave (e.g. for conference attendance) it would have to be in conjunction with Keeping-In-Touch (KIT) days. Otherwise, there would be implications for maternity pay.

¹ Having taken leave under Keele's Maternity policy

² Having taken leave under Keele's Adoption policy

³ Reviews will consider how well this fund helps to meet these objectives.

2. Eligibility

To be eligible to apply for funding, the returning member of staff must fulfil the following criteria. They must:

- be an existing member of academic staff on an Education & Scholarship, Education & Research or Research Fellow contract with a clear set of agreed research or scholarship goals.
- have 6 months remaining on their contract following their return from maternity, adoption or shared parental leave⁴, if they are on a fixed term contract, and be able to benefit from the expenditure before the end of their contract.
- not have handed in their notice, unless they have given a longer notice period (i.e. having 6 months or longer remaining as above)*.
- be/have been entitled to statutory maternity/adoption and less than 12 months has passed since they returned from their leave period (including any shared parental leave).

*If the applicant has handed in their notice, please discuss eligibility with HR Link Advisor or the Athena Swan Officer before making an application.

Applications can be made at any time of year, during the time period after a member of staff has informed the University of their intention to take maternity/adoption leave and within 6 months of the individual returning to work.

Staff who think that they may not meet all the eligibility criteria are invited to contact their HR Link Advisor to discuss their case further.

Researchers on Fixed-term Contracts

The Keele Academic Returner's Fund cannot normally be used to fund contract extensions. If you are a fixed-term Researcher and wish to extend your contract, please speak to your Principal Investigator / Line Manager to discuss funding options.

3. What Does the Funding Cover?

Applications for up to £3,300 can be made to help support research or scholarship during leave or on return to work. There is flexibility in how the money might be used and the following examples are not exhaustive nor appropriate for all returners:

- teaching buyout on return to work in order to focus on an item of research;
- assistance to cover administrative or technical duties associated with a research project;
- accessing coaching, training, conferences or writing retreats;

⁴ Eligibility extends to those who took shared parental leave but only for those staff who were also eligible to take maternity or adoption leave from Keele i.e. parent-1 as defined in our shared parental leave policy.

- visits to collaborators,
- publication costs including proof-reading;
- minor equipment purchase or service costs associated with a research project.

However, there are certain stipulations:

- If the funding is to support an additional member of staff, the full employment costs of the post will also need to be paid out of the money awarded to the applicant.
- The funding cannot be used to pay for general childcare costs to cover your expected attendance at work.
- The funding cannot be used to cover maternity/adoption leave costs to the department i.e. maternity/adoption cover is normally expected to be covered by the department.
- The funding cannot be used towards consumable costs.
- Relevant University procedure will need to be followed e.g. for recruitment, procurement or claims for travel and subsistence.

4. Application Process

The application form, which should be requested from your HR Advisor or a member of the HR EDI Team, needs to be completed and submitted by the Head of School / RI, after discussion with the individual taking maternity/adoption leave. Applications can be made at any time of year, during the time period after a member of staff has informed the University of their intention to take maternity/adoption leave and within 6 months of the individual returning to work. However, earlier applications would allow for advanced planning, which would be necessary in some circumstances (e.g. if teaching buyout is required or if a service needs to be procured).

HR will confirm the amount to be awarded, and the expenditure dates, to the individual and their Head of School. HR aim to do this within 4 weeks of receiving the completed application.

Expenditure normally needs to be made within a year of the individual having been notified that they are successful. If delays are envisaged the fund holder should contact their HR Advisor or the Athena Swan Officer as soon as practical.

It should be noted that, if a member of staff significantly changes their expected return date, after the University has committed to a start date for teaching cover (if applicable), it may not be possible to alter any existing arrangements.

Evaluation is vital in helping us to maintain or develop the Fund. The applicant and the Head of School will be sent a short evaluation to complete approximately 1 year after the applicant has been notified of the success of their application and will be asked to comment on how useful the support has been to both the applicant. Your feedback on the scheme is greatly appreciated.

Any queries relating to operation of the fund should be addressed to your HR Link Advisor or the Athena Swan Officer.