UCD Employee Guide: Workplace Supports for Fertility Treatment



Owner

EDI Unit

Introduction

This guideline provides workplace supports for employees undergoing fertility treatment. It is important to UCD that employees who are planning to have children, feel fully supported to do so and are facilitated to balance career, navigate the workplace, and their fertility journey. This also includes employees whose partners are undergoing fertility treatment.

Workplace Supports

Recognising that fertility journeys vary in length, number of treatments and that side effects can be very individualised, you are encouraged to consider the supports you may need at work.

- You do not have to make anyone aware that you are undergoing fertility treatment.
 However, you are advised to have a conversation with your line manager and/or HR Partner in order to make sure you are fully supported.
- It can be hard to talk to your manager about something so personal but they are there to support you at work. Don't be afraid to ask for flexibility or changes at work to support you during this period.
- If you don't feel comfortable talking to your manager in the first instance, you might consider talking to a HR Partner or a trusted colleague in the first instance.

Top tips to get the best from your conversation

Prepare	Review this guide in conjunction with UCD Fertility Policy. Further policies which offer flexibility and support for employees undergoing fertility treatment are noted in the support section of this document. Talk to other supports such as a HR Partner, EAS in advance if required.
Book a Meeting	Schedule a meeting with your manager. Having a time and date in the diary means you're not catching your manager on the hop, and they can also prepare for the meeting. Ask to have conversations in a private place where you won't be interrupted by anyone else. You can also book some private space to have your conversation in confidence.

Make a plan

Your manager is there to support you, together, you can come up with an action plan which works from both perspectives.

Your manager may need some time to seek advice themselves or find out what is on offer.

Discuss supports

- Medical Appointments and Procedures (Page3)
- Flexibility required (Page 2-3)
- Employee Supports (page 7)

Establish the level of confidentiality with your manager. Clarify with your manager who knows about the fertility treatment and who the employee is happy to know.

Agree if others should/are required to be informed of the adjustments and by who.

Agree a timeline for a check-in. Communicate that you may have different support needs at different stages and with different types of fertility treatments.

Follow Up

This is really important, as investigations, fertility treatments, taking medication may change over time, symptoms could arise. It may be that you need to tweak the adjustments if this happens.

Types of Flexibility you could discuss with your manager may include:

- Allowing time to rest and make the time up later
- Adjusting start and finish times
- Flexibility around the taking of breaks during the working day
- Flexibility around attending relevant medical appointments.
- Being flexible around last-minute adjustments to appointments where these might be time sensitive.
- Where feasible, temporary remote working or an adjusted workload can also be put in place temporarily (e.g., flexibility to dial in remotely to meetings).
- Time Off in Lieu is awarded for additional agreed work conducted outside of regular working hours provided that additional work has been agreed in advance. Further details can be found in UCD Overtime Policy.
- Where feasible, a manager may facilitate an employee through flexible working, to accompany their partner who is undergoing fertility treatment to attend medical appointments.

Medical Appointments, Procedures, Sick Leave

Medical appointments are covered under sick leave, however local arrangements, approved by the Head of School/Unit, are also accepted.

- Managers are encouraged to be flexible when approached by individuals who need to attend medical appointments and procedures related to their fertility.
 - For example, certain fertility treatments require egg retrieval and embryo implantation. In these situations, typically a full day's leave is required due to the nature of these treatments and the requirement for sedation. If this is the case, then this is treated as sick leave as per the sick leave policy once medically certified.
- In line with the public sector, UCD operates a sick pay scheme for staff that are absent due to injury or ill health.
- You and your manager will have a return to work conversation to support you in accordance with the University's Sick Leave policy where applicable.

Support for Staff

Undergoing fertility treatment can be an uncertain time for some. You are encourage to talk to your manager or HR Partner if you require support. There are also supports available to you including the Employee Assistance Service, Mental Health and Wellbeing Support Colleagues.

Employee Assistance Service

Contact the Employee Assistance Service - this is a 24/7 free and confidential support service designed to assist you in dealing more effectively with any personal or work-related problems you might be facing and provides access to mental health and wellbeing supports. The service is operated confidentially by Spectrum.Life, the largest provider of employee health and wellness services in Ireland. They empower people to take control of their own mental health and give them the knowledge, tools and support they need to look after it on an ongoing basis. https://www.ucd.ie/engage/employeerelations/employeeassistanceservice/

Supporting Colleagues Undergoing Fertility Treatment

Compassionate Conversations¹

- It can be hard to know what to say to an employee who is undergoing fertility treatment, or experiencing fertility issues or an employee whose partner is undergoing fertility treatment
- When a colleague opens up to you, in general, it is better to show an interest and ask how
 their investigations/treatment/surrogacy/adoption is going and how they are feeling. It is
 better to ask (or ask if it is okay to ask) than to say nothing because you are afraid of
 upsetting them as this can give the impression that you don't care.
- When someone has spoken with you in confidence, it is important to respect that and to keep the information confidential.
- Have compassion for all: Couples who do not conceive a child naturally, Individuals with secondary infertility (i.e. someone has a child or children but is having difficulties conceiving again), for same-sex couples, and individuals seeking to have a child, may undergo fertility treatments.

¹ CIPD Guide for Colleagues to support those experiencing fertility challenges, investigations or treatment

- There is an emotional, physical, financial and social strain for employees undergoing fertility treatment.
- Fertility journeys vary in length, number of treatments and side effects and can be very individualised.
- Employees may have experienced one or more failed cycles, or this may be the last chance at fertility treatment and their plans to have children may no longer be viable. Employees may be experiencing grief and bereavement.
- Avoid making assumptions based on your own, or others' experience of fertility, miscarriage and bereavement, and starting a family

Sensitive events

- Certain events could be particularly upsetting for a colleague experiencing fertility challenges, investigations or treatment, such as Mother's Day or Father's Day, pregnancy announcements and baby showers.
- This doesn't mean that colleagues who are expecting a child can't share their experience and anticipation or be celebrated. However, there is a need to show compassion and sensitivity if you know another team member hasn't been so fortunate.

The University wants to ensure that it continues to provide the best supports that it can to employees undergoing fertility treatment and to people managers supporting employees and for that reason these documents are iterative. If you have suggestions around other supports that may be of assistance or raising awareness around this topic please contact edi@ucd.ie

Resources

UCD Policies

- Fertility Policy
- Career Break
- Overtime Policy
- Sick Leave
- Shorter Working Year
- Support for Employees Taking Family Related Leave Policy and Guidelines
- Bereavement Policy
- Mental Health and Wellbeing in UCD

Internal Supports

- Your line manager
- HR Partners
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Support Colleagues
- Employee Assistance Service: Confidential 24-hour service through the Employee Assistance Service (EAS): www.ucd.ie/engage/employeerelations/employeeassistanceservice/

External

- HSE Fertility Treatment
- National Infertility Support and Information Group:
- CFIreland
- Irish Cancer Society:
- HSE Miscarriage
- HSE Pregnancy Loss
- Irish Hospice Foundation

Sources

- CIPD Guide for Colleagues to support those experiencing fertility challenges, investigations or treatment
 - www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/guides/2023-pdfs/2023-fertility-colleague-guide-8382.pdf
- IBEC Fertility and Menopause Guide: www.ibec.ie/employer-hub/hr-management-guide/leave/maternity-leave/implementation-guidelines/fertility-and-menopause-guide
- PLACES | Pregnancy Loss (under 24 weeks) in Workplaces: Informing policymakers on support mechanisms, Report 2024:
- <u>www.gov.ie/en/publication/0e7d5-places-pregnancy-loss-under-24-weeks-in-workplaces-informing-policymakers-on-support-mechanisms/</u>
- HSE National Standards for Bereavement Care following Pregnancy Loss and Perinatal Death: <u>www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/acute-hospitals-division/woman-infants/national-fertility-services/</u>

V1. 13/05/2024