

Breastfeeding Procedure

Approved by Human Resources Division

1. Purpose

1.1 The University of Limerick recognises the importance and benefits of breastfeeding, and understands that many employees will return to work whilst they continue to breastfeed. The University is therefore committed to providing staff members with flexibility to take breaks (lactation breaks) during their workday for the purpose of expressing and storing breast milk.

1.2 The aim of this procedure is to create a working environment that is supportive of breastfeeding employees. This includes supporting staff to breastfeed and /or express breast milk as needed during their working day. The procedure highlights the responsibility of all staff in this regard.

2. Scope

2.1 This procedure applies to all current University employees who are breastfeeding/lactating.

3. Entitlements

3.1 Breastfeeding means breastfeeding a child or expressing milk and storing it for the purpose of feeding it to the child at a later time. Expressing milk enables a mother to continue to breastfeed upon their return to work. The HSE website (listed on the EDI website) provides useful guidance around the preparation for returning to work and continuing to breastfeed.

3.2 The Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004 provides an entitlement to paid breastfeeding/lactation breaks - one hour each day away from their work (with pay) or a reduction in work hours in order to breastfeed/lactate. Under the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023, employees will be entitled to take paid breastfeeding/lactating breaks for two years (104 weeks) after the birth of the child. This supports employees who are breastfeeding while returning to the workplace.

3.3 The normal practice for breastfeeding on the return to work is to use the break to express milk. An employee may also choose to breastfeed their child directly during these breaks. If an employee chooses to breastfeed their child directly during these breaks, it is expected that the child would normally be in the care of someone else before and after the breastfeeding break. The break may comprise of the following per day:

- 1 x 60-minute period
- 2 x 30-minute periods
- 3 x 20-minute periods

3.4 It should be noted that breastfeeding breaks are to be taken in addition to meal breaks and breastfeeding breaks cannot be accumulated. The breaks may be taken at the start, end or during the day. Part-time staff are entitled to breastfeeding breaks, to be calculated on a pro-rate basis. This break should be constructed in a manner that is agreed between the employee and manager.

3.5 Employees should Inform their manager in writing of their request for reduced hours for breastfeeding four weeks before their return from maternity leave.

4. Breastfeeding Facilities

4.1 The designated room provided by the University for breastfeeding is E0-010A which is located in the Main Building. The following guidelines apply to the use of this room;

a) Access to the Mother and Baby room is by way of keypad. Details of the keypad code may be obtained from the Compensation & Benefits Office (Room D1-042).
b) Please ensure the "occupied" notice is displayed on the door whilst in use.
c) This facility is strictly for your own use. Please do not permit any other person to use it.
d) As this room will be used by other mothers, please leave it clean and tidy.
e) Make sure that the room is securely locked when you are leaving to ensure that it is only used by authorised personnel.
f) The Mother and Baby Room is available to mothers who are breastfeeding and for pregnant staff who suffer from fatigue related to their pregnancy and who wish to rest for a short period during the day. If any other person has access, we would appreciate you informing the Compensation & Benefits Office (Room D1-042) immediately.
g) Pregnant staff who use this room (outside their break times) must notify their manager on each occasion prior to use and must similarly notify their manager on their return to normal work.
h) Staff members who use the room are required to respect the privacy and security of the room and of those who use it. Individuals are expected to coordinate its use with the other mothers using the room.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

University Management Team have a responsibility to:

- To promote the importance of breastfeeding for parents and children .
- To ensure that UL is a breastfeeding friendly and welcoming environment for all who wish to breastfeed without any restrictions.
- To support the provision of breastfeeding/lactation facilities for those who wish to use them.

Line Managers Line Managers/Head of School/Unit have a responsibility to:

- To be familiar with the University's Breastfeeding Procedure.
- Be supportive and flexible in supporting breastfeeding employees and meeting employees' needs to express milk.
- Meet with the individual to discuss their needs and provide supports following their return from maternity leave.
- Review work schedules and agree the manner in which breastfeeding breaks will be taken in consultation with the employee.
- Communicate with the employee in relation to arrangements put in place and review after one month and thereafter as required, recognising that the needs in relation to breastfeeding breaks may change.
- Maintain a record of requests made by employees and arrangements put in place and any comments in relation to the procedure.
- Ensure employees are aware of the procedure and the breastfeeding employees break and support its implementation.
- Inform the individual of the supports available internally and externally.

Employees have a responsibility to:

- Inform their manager in writing of their request for reduced hours for breastfeeding four weeks before their return from maternity leave.
- Agree with their line manager at the local level on breastfeeding breaks.
- Communicate with the line manager in relation to arrangements put in place and speak to the line manger if adjustments to the arrangement is required, recognising that needs in relation to breastfeeding/ breaks may change.
- Respect the privacy of breastfeeding/lactation facilities and others availing of the facilities.
- Take responsibility for the maintenance of their own equipment.
- Take responsibility for storage and labelling of their own breast milk.
- Ensure that facilities are left in a hygienic condition before leaving.

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