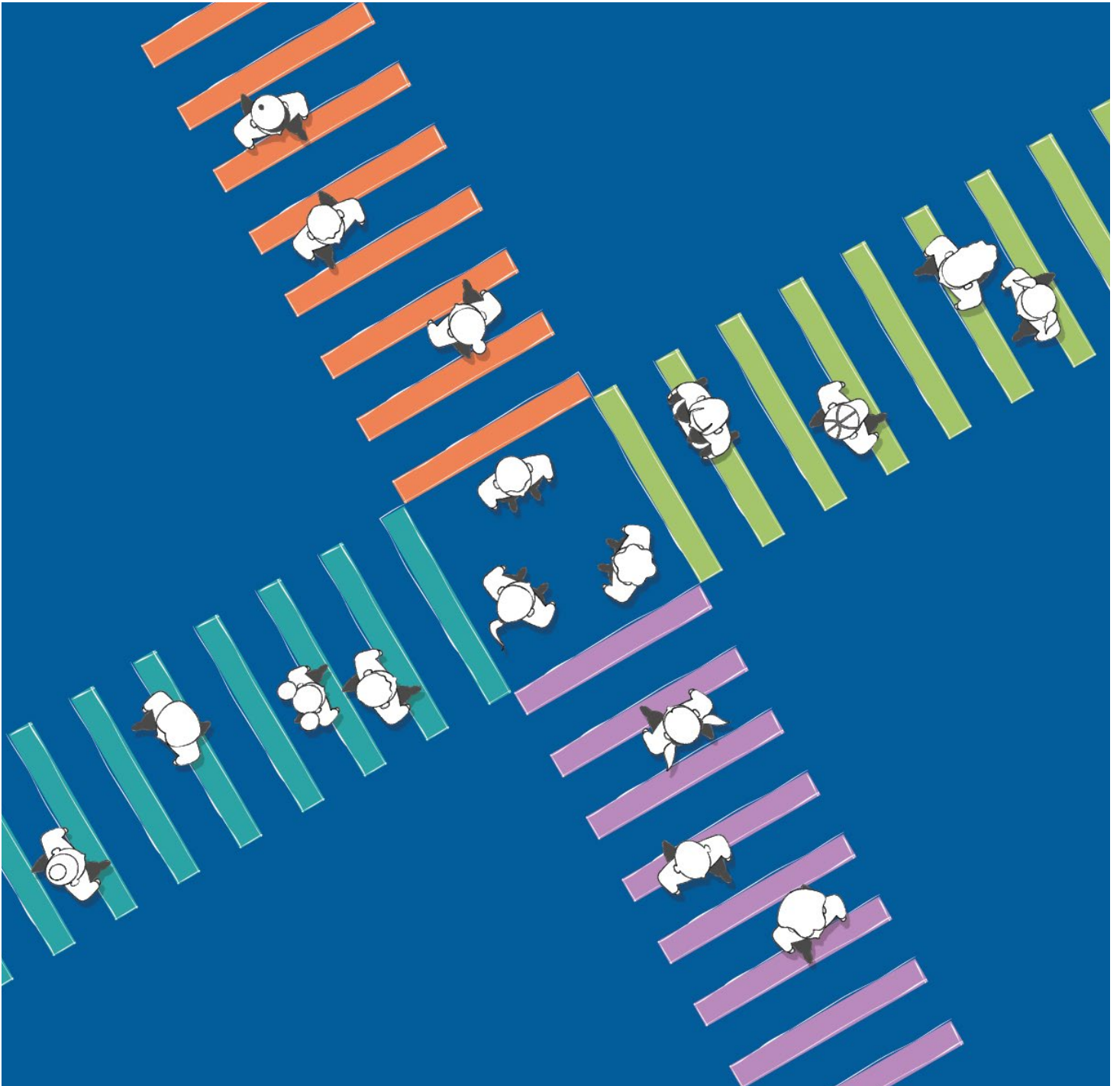




universität
wien

Culture and Equality

Recommendations: Leadership for a better work-life balance



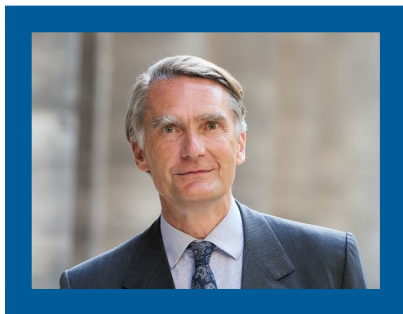
Foreword

The University of Vienna is a place where people with different backgrounds, aspirations and talents work together to pursue their academic and professional careers. They all share the desire, and the need, to balance their professional and academic lives with the various demands made by other areas of life, from childcare and caregiving responsibilities for relatives to further education, volunteer work, medical restrictions, hobbies and passions. As an executive, you will often find yourself navigating between the various needs of your employees and the needs of the university.

Ensuring employees can keep a good balance between work and other areas of life fosters their motivation and engagement, increases employee retention and thus reduces turnover and long-term sickness. Your commitment and role modelling plays a critical role in creating a good working environment at the University of Vienna.

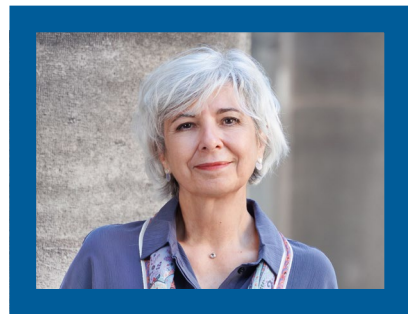
We have put together some information, tips and ideas to help you integrate leadership decisions for a better work-life balance into your everyday practice. Executives have a lot on their plates – allow yourself to be supported and make use of these recommendations to create a work environment that (better) reconciles work, private and family life.

Thank you for your contribution to cultivating a culture of support at the University of Vienna!



A blue ink handwritten signature of Sebastian Schütze, featuring a stylized 'S' and 'S'.

Sebastian Schütze
Rector



A blue ink handwritten signature of Manuela Baccarini, written in a cursive style.

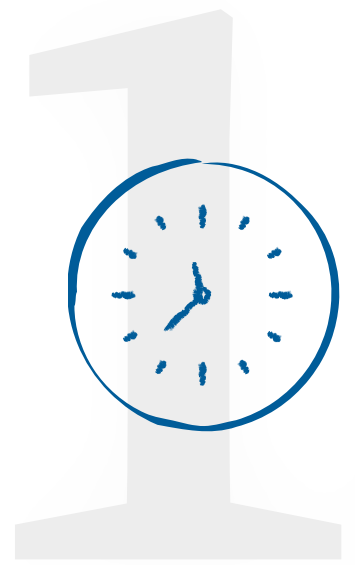
Manuela Baccarini
Vice-Rector for Research and
International Affairs

Contents

Foreword	2
1. Work hours	4
Scheduling meetings for a variety of needs	4
Work schedule – providing as much flexibility as possible	5
Rest and relaxation – the art of setting boundaries	6
2. Place of work and work organisation	8
Working from home and at the office – finding the right balance	8
Increased workloads – defining priorities and taking preventive action	9
3. Managing leave & the return to work	11
(Expectant) mothers and fathers at work	11
When employees need time off	13
4. Parenthood and (academic) project-based work	15
Pregnancy – wonderful news, but why now?	15
Parents as researchers and teaching staff – can it work?	16
5. Employees with and without time constraints/ medical restrictions	18
Parents and childfree employees – balancing different needs	18
Compensating for long-term/recurring medical restrictions	19
6. Training and continuing education, leave of absence for research or teaching	21
Encouraging employees to thrive	21
Leaves of absence in academia – a balancing act	22
Legal notice	23

Work hours

Scheduling meetings for a variety of needs



This may sound familiar ...

Some employees have difficulty attending meetings in the afternoons, others prefer to keep their mornings free to focus on work and some need a clearly defined lunch break. Finding the right time for a meeting can feel like squaring the circle when you're trying to consider your employees' varying needs within the scope of what is necessary for university operations.



This may help:

- Agree on a timeframe for internal meetings with all your employees. This should be between 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM (especially if your team includes parents with dependent children).
- Establish a stand-in arrangement for when someone is unable to attend a meeting.
- It won't always be possible to keep meetings within this timeframe. In these cases, make sure you give sufficient notice (e.g. to allow parents to organize childcare).
- Make sure your employees understand that scheduling meetings always means striking a balance between employees' diverging needs and the needs of the university.

Please note: Avoid scheduling meetings at weekends, at the start or end of the working day or on days when schools are closed.





Did you know?

- The [Children's Office's Flying Nannies](#) offer flexible childcare, e.g. for when you can't avoid scheduling an important meeting in the evening. Every employee can use this service free of charge up to three times a year (also known as [FleKuKi](#), flexible short-term childcare).

Work schedule – providing as much flexibility as possible

Tailoring work to each stage of life

Employees often want to switch between full-time and part-time employment, depending on the stage of life they are in. In certain (brief) phases, caregiving (e.g. childcare or caring for a relative) or self-care demands (e.g. continuing education or medical restrictions) make it difficult for them to keep to the agreed working hours. The organisational unit, too, may benefit from flexible work arrangements as a way to respond to change.



This is where you have some leeway:

- Allow your employees to adjust their working hours if this is compatible with your team's needs.
- You can also proactively propose different working hours when there are changes within the team (i.e. replacements, changes in responsibilities).
- If, for a certain period, employees need to work fewer hours for personal reasons, agree on a timeframe for recuperating missed time. The necessary legal framework for this is defined in the company-level agreement on flexible working time.
- Certain caregiving needs, such as the need to care for a sick child, to accompany someone to the doctor or to provide emergency care for a family member, are often hard to predict and usually require workers to apply for dependant care leave. If requested by

the employee, consider allowing them to spontaneously (swap) remote working days when the caregiving needs primarily require their physical presence and easily allow them to work from home.

Please note: You may also need to reduce your hours in certain stages of life, even as an executive.



? Did you know?

- Dependant care leave can also be granted for close relatives not living in the same household as well as for people living in the same household even if they are not related.

Keywords: [Children's Office](#), [Company-level agreement on flexible working time](#), [Dependant care leave](#), [Dependant care part-time work](#), [Family hospice part-time work](#), [Parental part-time work](#), [Phased return to work](#), [Pre-retirement part-time work](#)



Rest and relaxation – the art of setting boundaries

I'll just take care of this quickly ...

In the past few years, the possibilities for flexible working have greatly increased. This gives employees more autonomy and allows them to switch between work and free time much more flexibly than before. However, this can also become stressful when the boundaries between work and rest blur and employees are unable to switch off.



This can reduce the pressure on your employees:

- Clarify what you (don't) expect from your employees – and what employees (shouldn't) expect from one another.
- Define the times when you and your employees will and won't be available (especially for periods outside of usual working hours, e.g. in the evening, on weekends, etc.).
- Even if you personally find it more difficult or less important to set clear boundaries between work and time off, understand that this can be important for your employees and be considerate.
- Add a note to the end of your email when communicating outside of usual working hours, e.g. "I do not expect a reply outside of working hours."
- Make sure you take your own allotted holiday time and encourage your employees to do so too.
- Try to arrange your employees' time off in such a way as to avoid putting too much pressure on the remaining staff.

Please note: An executive's choice to work outside of normal working hours and on holiday can often pressure other executives and employees to do the same. This type of leadership can lead to medical issues and increased fluctuation among executives and employees.



Keywords: Continuing education on resilience, stress management and burnout prevention, Occupational health promotion



Place of work and work organisation



Working from home and at the office – finding the right balance

Working from home: a blessing and a curse

Remote working and working from home is here to stay. This offers many advantages for most employees when it comes to balancing work with other areas of life. At the same time, it can make setting boundaries between work and private life more difficult and impede social interactions within the team. Executives also need to balance their employees' preferences with the needs of the university within their area of responsibility.



Suggestions on how to organise working from home and from the office:

- Define one day a week when all employees are at the office.
- Use trust as opposed to control but respond to abuse if need be.
- Organise a regular shared activity (e.g. lunch) that can help everyone connect.
- Work performed from home is just as valuable as work performed at the office – and equally deserving of support and recognition.
- Allow employees to work remotely at short notice but also demand time spent at the office in return.
- Keep in touch with employees who are working from home for long periods.

Please note: Allow your employees to make full use of the time they have available for working from home as long as this doesn't impair university operations, regardless of your own preferences regarding working from home.



? Did you know?

- Parents who are marginally employed while on parental leave can apply to work from home 100% of the time. Employees can also apply to have more days available for remote work in certain other situations (e.g. if they suffer from chronic illness).

Keywords: Company-level agreement on working from home



Increased workloads – defining priorities and taking preventive action

Another new project ...

Workloads and project-based work are increasing at the university. This may be aggravated by the shortage of skilled workers or long-term staff absences, further increasing the workload on the team. If left unchecked over a prolonged period of time, this can lead to overworked employees and cause medical issues.



This is how you can foster a healthy and motivating work environment:

- Let your superior know in good time when your department/team has reached its limits.
- Discuss which tasks to prioritise with your superior if there is a risk of your team's workload becoming too high.
- Evaluate whether all tasks are shared fairly among your team (taking into account individuals' agreed working hours) and all processes are easy to follow.
- Make sure that your team has the necessary expertise for new tasks/projects (training existing members and/or adding new team members if possible).
- When employees are on sick leave for long periods of time, this can create more work for their colleagues. Adjust tasks and schedules according to the available capacity and postpone less urgent work.

Please note: Pay attention to when someone on your team is struggling and try to find a way to reduce their workload together with the employee in question. Allowing employees to feel persistently overworked can be costly if it leads to fluctuation or long-term sick leave.



Keywords: [Conflict resolution counselling office](#), [Works council of the general and scientific university staff](#), [Work psychology](#)



Managing leave & the return to work



(Expectant) mothers and fathers at work

Supporting pregnancy and parenthood

There are several things to consider if one of your employees is pregnant or wants to take parental leave – from notice periods to the Maternity Protection Act and finding a temporary replacement. Perhaps it has been a while, or you are not yet familiar with the process.



Here's an overview of what you need to know:

- The Handbook for (future) parents and their superiors as well as subject-specific pages on the intranet give an overview of legal aspects, checklists, guidelines for discussing parental leave, etc.
- Occupational health practitioners will evaluate the place of work and assess whether it is suitable for an expectant and/or breastfeeding mother. As an executive, you will be informed if changes need to be made.
- Pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers are strictly prohibited from working in laboratories or with hazardous materials. You can obtain the relevant information from occupational health practitioners.
- Babies and children at work? Employees are generally allowed to take nursing breaks during working hours, provided they notify you of this. Whether children may be brought to work in emergencies or exceptional situations must be discussed with you as the executive, with the main condition being that they do not interrupt general operations or disturb other employees.

Help drive cultural change:

- Try to respond positively to pregnancy and parental leave, even if the circumstances may be challenging.
- Avoid over- or underwhelming pregnant women. Different individuals experience pregnancy very differently – if you're unsure, just ask.
- Anticipate and tolerate periods where childcare will be more time-consuming – not just for women but also for men.
- Don't leave it up to those affected, especially mothers, to ask for meetings and tasks to be made compatible with their caregiving responsibilities.
- Budget for optional on-site childcare (e.g. by the Flying Nannies) when organising conferences, events, etc. (provided that there is sufficient space and funding available).

Did you know?

- You are not permitted to ask about pregnancy or family plans during the application process. Similarly, your decision to hire or reject a candidate has to be based on qualification alone and must be made independently of their existing family circumstances or plans to start a family.
- If a pregnant employee's contract is set to expire, it is automatically extended until maternity protection begins (exceptions).

Quick tip:

- If you have the available space, you may wish to provide a family room for nursing parents or toddlers/children that need to be taken care of at short notice.

Keywords: Early parental leave ('Papamonat'), Maternity protection, Occupational health, Parental leave, Parental part-time work



When employees need time off

Leave can be planned and managed

Employees' needs for time off work can vary in their predictability: While you might need to find quick solutions for sudden caregiving responsibilities or in the event of death, other absences such as parental leave and personal leave (e.g. for continuing education) can be planned in advance. The most important things to consider for you as an executive include scheduling meetings with the employee before and after their leave, finding a temporary replacement to reduce the burden on the team and agreeing on coordinated communication with the employee if they wish to remain in contact during their leave.



How to best prepare for an employee's leave and return to work:

- Schedule a planning meeting with the employee before their leave to clarify the following points: planned start and expected duration of their time off work, handover and temporary replacement, and the possibility of marginal employment, teaching or further training during their leave, if this is requested by the employee.
- If your employee agrees, keep in touch with them on an ad hoc basis during their time off work.
- If an individual is on leave for a long time, schedule a return meeting around three months before they plan to return to work. Use this to clarify the definitive return date, the number of hours they will work, the timing of working hours, etc.

- Give the returning employee a warm welcome and bring them up to speed, possibly together with relevant colleagues, especially as to their area of work.
- Find more details as well as checklists, guidelines and registration periods in the [Handbook for \(future\) parents and their superiors](#).

Did you know?

- Employees on leave are still allowed to participate in committees and commissions with voting rights.
- You can hold staff appraisals with employees on leave, if they so wish.
- Entitlements related to years of service (salary progression) continue during maternity leave, parental leave and early parental leave.
- Fixed-term contracts are extended by the duration of maternity protection/parental leave ([exceptions](#)).
- You can find a collection of [FAQs on temporary replacements](#) on the intranet.

Keywords: [Care leave](#), [Early parental leave](#) ('Papamonat'), [Educational leave](#), [Family hospice care leave](#), [Parental leave](#), [Rehabilitation leave](#), [Replacement employees](#), [Sabbatical](#), [Unpaid leave](#)



Parenthood and (academic) project-based work



Pregnancy – wonderful news, but why now?

How you handle pregnancy matters

Pregnancy in the middle of a project or in periods of heavy workload can be challenging for you as the executive or project manager. Finding a temporary replacement is often not affordable, especially in an academic context, but the work has to get done all the same. Even if you find it stressful – which is completely understandable –, do not make the pregnant employee feel that they are responsible for any increased pressure at work. Try to lower stress levels and use all available options to find flexible solutions.



These things can help:

- Make full use of all options for recruiting temporary replacement staff when needed (see [FAQs on temporary replacements](#)).
- Find out if someone on your team/in your working group would like to temporarily increase their working hours.
- Check the possibility of extending the project at no extra cost.
- Start looking for a replacement to teach and supervise qualifying papers in good time.

Did you know?

- There is special support available for (expectant) parents in academia.
- Employees on parental leave who choose to work on marginal employment are allowed to work from home 100% of the time and can also be employed above the marginal earnings threshold for up to 13 weeks.
- More information on the differences between personnel covered by third-party funding and university funding in terms of maternity protection/parental leave is available on the intranet.

Quick tip:

- If somebody is unable to continue doing lab work because they are pregnant or breastfeeding, discuss how they can bridge the time in a meaningful way (e.g. by writing papers). If possible, and if the person in question wishes to do so, they may delegate lab work to research assistants, technical assistants, doctoral candidates or master's degree students. As the faculty/centre management, you are responsible for establishing the financial conditions for this.

Parents as researchers and teaching staff – can it work?

Managing the experiences and expectations of different generations

When is the right time to start a family? It can be difficult to balance academia and being an active parent. Many successful academics have seen this and have often decided not to have a family (especially women) or to be less involved in childcare (especially men). This also means that not everyone fully understands why the next generation should demand a different work-life balance.

Help drive cultural change:

- Take periods of care work into account when evaluating academic CVs.
- Prioritize the quality of the work over the quantity of presence and output.
- Agree on a timeframe for internal meetings with all your employees. This should be between 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM (especially if your team includes parents with dependent children).

Please note: Avoid sharing important information on informal occasions that employees with caregiving responsibilities or other restrictions may not be able to attend (e.g. in the evenings or outside of regular working hours).



Did you know?

- Both the [FWF](#) and the [European Research Council](#) take career breaks due to pregnancy, childcare and caregiving responsibilities into account.
- The University of Vienna has a [Mobility & Care Fund](#) for female academics who face additional childcare costs when away.
- The qualification period for doctoral and tenure track positions is extended by the duration of maternity leave and parental leave/part-time work.

Keywords: [Guide Academic careers and gender bias](#), [Mobility & Care Fund](#), [Pregnancy/parenthood and academia](#)



Employees with and without time constraints/ medical restrictions



Parents and childfree employees – balancing different needs

Which needs are given priority?

If employees repeatedly have to take time off work because their child is ill again, this can cause resentment among their colleagues. Other employees may also perceive parents' time constraints in the afternoons as stressful. Granting caregiving responsibilities the necessary space is an important aspect of reconciling work, private and family life. But employees who do not have caregiving responsibilities mustn't be given the impression that they are always expected to compensate for these absences. This can often be a balancing act.



This can prevent feelings of injustice:

- Address any subtle or overt resentment and express your understanding for additional workloads colleagues may be facing while also making it clear that having the opportunity to care for a sick relative is an important achievement of labour law which everyone can benefit from at some point in their lives (e.g. when caring for relatives).
- Wherever possible, try not to always assign the same tasks to the same people but distribute them among different individuals.
- Show your childfree employees that they too can assert time constraints in specific cases (e.g. for sports or social activities).

Compensating for long-term/ recurring medical restrictions

How much longer will we have to endure these exceptional circumstances?

Long-term health-related absences are a struggle for every team. In addition to the extra work involved, not knowing when the person will be able to return can also be a challenge. It is particularly important to lead with empathy in these cases, to ensure that employees experiencing additional strain feel seen and don't run out of steam too soon. Make it clear to the sick person that they are not to blame for any pressure their situation may be putting on the team.



Suggestions for bridging the gap:

- Decide which tasks have to be delegated and which can be paused or postponed.
- Talk to your employees regularly and ask them how they feel about the situation. Show them that you see and appreciate their extra work.
- If they agree, maintain regular contact with the sick employee and inform them about the possibility of applying to temporarily work from home 100% of the time if their health permits. This also requires a statement from an occupational health practitioner and the approval of personnel management.
- If appropriate, inform the sick employee about the possibility of a phased return to work.

Please note: Medical restrictions or stress caused by caring for relatives are often taboo subjects in everyday working life. By actively addressing the subject with your team, you help create an open, trusting environment.



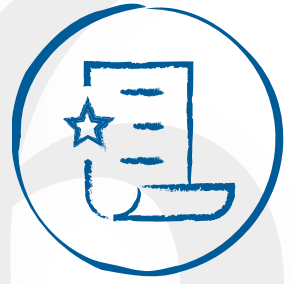
Did you know?

- Family carers can attend regular get-togethers and make use of individual coaching services to support their mental health.

Keywords: Company-level agreement on flexible working time,
Occupational health promotion, Phased return to work



Training and continuing education, leave of absence for research or teaching



Encouraging employees to thrive

Further education creates good employees and fosters motivation

The University of Vienna is not only a place of education for students and junior researchers, it is also a place of work for people who want to continue learning and evolving on the job. This applies to academics who, for example, want to improve their leadership skills as well as for administrative employees who are ready to take on new roles or expand their area of responsibility.



Try to enable your employees to ...

- participate in further education programmes at the University of Vienna during working hours (to an extent that is reasonable for ongoing operations).
- participate in courses that qualify as meaningful further training “on the job”.
- take educational leave, provided that there are no formal or official reasons to the contrary.

Leaves of absence in academia – a balancing act

Escaping the treadmill – time for research!?

Academic employees can request a paid or unpaid leave of absence in order to pursue a specific research activity. This can be important and beneficial for their career, but it also means that colleagues have to take on extra teaching and administrative work.



Make sure that ...

- you only grant leaves of absence for research if teaching activities and other tasks (administration, committees, etc.) are adequately covered.
- you treat different groups of employees (according to group, gender, age, qualification level, etc.) as equally as possible, including with regard to the length of leave.

Please note: Again – leaves of absence can put extra pressure on colleagues. Try to distribute the vacant tasks among the other members of the institute/working group as fairly and evenly as possible.



Legal notice

Publisher:

Universität Wien

Content and editing:

Culture and Equality unit

Waltraud Schlögl, Nina Krebs, Sylwia Bukowska

Graphic design and layout:

Marion Wotruba – Graphic & Art Design,
marionwotruba.design

Photos:

Johannes Hloch,

derknopfdruecker.com

Proofreading and English translation:

Katherine Bodner,

katherinebodner.com

We would like to thank all participants in our focus groups on
“Reconciliation-friendly leadership in a hybrid work environment”

Vienna, August 2025.

© All rights reserved

