Supporting a departmental culture in which male and female staff feel able to take advantage of their entitlement to maternity and paternity leave can help to attract, retain and motivate a diverse and talented workforce.

This guide is designed to encourage departments to adopt best practice in paternity leave. Following a number of Juno visits to departments at various stages of their Juno journey, the Institute Diversity Team found that there was more confusion about paternity leave regulations and pay compared with maternity leave regulations and pay. While there was generally good knowledge about maternity entitlements, there was far less understanding about what the equivalent entitlements for new fathers were.

What UK law says

Maternity/adoption leave
New mothers (or new adoptive mothers) are eligible to take up to 52 weeks maternity/adoption leave, made up of “Ordinary Maternity Leave” (first 26 weeks) and “Additional Maternity Leave” (last 26 weeks). While on maternity/adoption leave, the mother is entitled to Statutory Maternity/Adoption Pay (SMP), which is paid for up to 39 weeks. As a minimum, it must be paid at 90% of an individual’s average weekly earnings for the first six weeks, and a set amount determined by the government or 90% of their average weekly earnings (whichever is lower) for the next 33 weeks.

Paternity/adoption leave
New fathers may be eligible for up to two weeks paid “Ordinary Paternity Leave” following the birth of their child and up to 26 weeks “Additional Paternity Leave” from 20 weeks after the birth of the child, but only if the mother has returned to work before she has used up her full entitlement to maternity leave. The statutory weekly rate of ordinary Paternity Pay and Additional Paternity Pay is a set amount determined by the government, or 90% of your average weekly earnings (whichever is lower). Fathers are only entitled to Additional Paternity Pay if the mother has not used her full entitlement to Statutory Maternity Pay.

Planned changes to the law on paternity leave and pay
From April 2015 the government plans to enable both parents to share the entire period of leave, providing families with more flexibility to decide which parent is in a better position to take the leave and care for the child during the first year.

Paternity leave in higher education physics departments
Despite the provisions that have been put in place by the government, many new fathers in higher education physics departments are choosing not to take time off following the birth of their child. In a short survey conducted by the Institute Diversity Team, only 9% of respondents were actually aware of any men who had taken Additional Paternity Leave. Our survey work identified three main reasons for the low uptake:

- A general lack of awareness of a partner’s right to share the leave and their entitlement to Additional Paternity Pay if Statutory Maternity pay entitlement has not been used up.
- A belief that it would be impossible to take an extended period of time off work and that if leave was taken it would have a negative impact on their career.
- Financial considerations that make it unfeasible to sacrifice their full salary during the leave period.

“In practice three months off isn’t a long time, which is why it made sense to share the leave with my wife.”
Richard Alexander
University of Leicester
Supporting a departmental culture in which staff feel able to take advantage of their entitlement to paternity leave

It is clear that departments need to do more to promote paternity leave. Therefore, departments could consider some or all of the following actions:

- Monitoring uptake of paternity leave and surveying male staff’s reasons for choosing not to take the leave. Developing actions as appropriate.
- Publicising the provision of both “Ordinary” and “Additional Paternity Leave” to ensure staff are aware of their rights, particularly targeting male academic staff.
- Collecting and promoting “human interest stories” of men that have taken the leave to reduce stigma.
- Setting up forums or mentoring schemes where men can seek advice and support from other men who are considering taking the leave, and from colleagues that have taken the leave in the past.
- Making an explicit commitment to supporting staff who choose to take the leave and outlining what they can expect from the department while they are on leave, and the support that they will receive on their return.
- Providing managers and PIs with training to ensure that they are able to adequately prepare for any periods of paternity leave that their staff choose to take.
- Offering enhancements to the statutory pay fathers receive while on paternity leave.

CASE STUDY: Rob Nyman, Imperial College London

Rob, an EPSRC Fellow, took Additional Paternity Leave when his partner returned to work after their baby turned nine months old.

It was a combination of financial and practical considerations that led Rob to take over caring for the baby when his partner returned to work. Despite putting their child’s name on the waiting list for the university’s nursery 13 weeks into the pregnancy, their baby was 11 months old before a space was available. His wife had wanted to take the first nine months off and was offered a significant financial incentive to return to work at the end of this period. This meant that it made financial sense for Rob to take over as the primary carer before their son could start nursery.

For Rob a nine-week period of leave seemed manageable and he was able to maintain some contact with the department while he was away. His funding body, the EPSRC, has said that it is happy to grant him a no-cost extension at the end of his grant that will be put down to justifiable staff absence. The biggest challenge was working out how to ensure that his new PhD student was supported in his absence. Using his full allocation of “Keeping in Touch” days, Rob managed to continue supervising his student, the single other researcher working on the grant for which Rob is the PI. He didn’t think that this would have been such a big issue if he’d had a bigger team where someone else could have stepped into the role.

Rob is conscious that during the short period he was away there were some missed opportunities. For example, he missed his department’s postgraduate recruitment event, which may have affected his chances of attracting another PhD student. He also acknowledged that he would have struggled to meet deadlines for last-minute grant applications. His research slowed down during the period, but he believes that colleagues will give him the couple of months allowance he needs. He is happy that he decided to take the leave and is likely to do the same thing again if he has another child.