

School of Politics and Economics (SPE)

Proposal for a Parenting Study Leave Following a Return from Family-Friendly Leaves.

This document outlines SPE's policy to grant one-semester of research leave to academic staff returning from a [family-friendly leave](#) (maternity, shared parental, surrogacy and adoption leave, and career break¹) which lasts a minimum of twenty weeks. The policy seeks to mitigate the impact of an extensive leave taken for parenting and caring responsibilities on research productivity and is therefore applied regardless of gender and sexual orientation.

Background

Several leading universities in the U.K. – including UCL, LSE, Imperial, and Oxford – currently provide one or two terms of research leave to returning staff from parenting and caring leaves. At King's, The Dickson Poon School of Law already provides one semester of research leave to academic staff returning from extended parental or caring leave.

The adoption of parenting study leaves is informed by extensive research that identifies parenthood as a key source of career and productivity gaps (e.g. Di Leo et al. 2024; Kim and Moser 2021; Morgan et al. 2021).² Scholars estimate a gender productivity gap of approximately five years that is largely attributed to caring responsibilities.

Rationale

A policy that provides parenting study leave to academic staff affirms SPE's commitment to supporting equity in career advancement for academic staff. The aim of the parenting study leave in SPE is to bridge career and research productivity gaps imposed by taking extensive leave for caregiving responsibilities. The parenting study leave supports returning staff, such that they can regain momentum in their research careers, thereby promoting gender equity within SPE.

Eligibility

To meet the requirements for a parenting study leave in SPE, staff must:

- 1) be a member of academic staff on Education & Research Pathway OR a member of staff on the Academic Education Pathway
- 2) be eligible for extended [family-friendly leave](#) (maternity, adoption and surrogacy, shared parental leave and career break taken for caring responsibilities) agreed to last twenty weeks or more, in line with King's policy.

¹ Career break, an unpaid leave of up to 1 year, is an eligible family-friendly leave for this scheme if it has been taken to address non-standard caring responsibilities (such as child's illness or elderly care). As is the case with other family-friendly leaves eligible for this scheme, evidence of extensive caring responsibilities of staff members taking career break must be provided.

² Di Leo, R., et al. (2024). "Motherhood in academia: A novel dataset of UK academic women with an application to maternity leave uptake." Social Policy & Administration; Kim, S. D. and Moser, P. (2021). "Women in Science. Lessons from the Baby Boom", NBER Working Paper Series; Morgan et al. (2021). "The unequal impact of parenthood in academia", Science Advances

Terms of Leave

Uptake of parenting study leave does not have an impact on member of staff's eligibility for standard study leave (i.e. Sabbatical/research leave). Parenting study leave reflects parenting and caring responsibilities and is therefore awarded in addition to standard study leave. As with parental and similar leaves in SPE, parenting study leave counts towards staff's three years' qualifying service with the university for standard study leave.

As with standard study leave, parenting study leave taken by eligible staff is subject to approval by the Head of Department and the Head of School. The leave is available in one of the two semesters (Jan-Apr; Sept-Dec) immediately following return from the eligible family-friendly leave. Upon application, staff indicates which semester they intend to take the parenting leave, but the choice of the semester is subject to approval by the relevant Head of Department.

The leave is funded from within each department. Members of staff who are not currently taking advantage of the parenting study leave will take up the WAM points averaged across them. To reduce any potential WAM pressures in departments, pausing to offer optional modules normally taught by staff on parenting study leave is expected.

As with family-friendly leaves in SPE, staff returning from parenting study leave is entitled to keep the modules they were teaching previously, provided this is consistent with department and faculty policies on the availability of optional and other modules.

How to Apply

Members of staff who intend to take parenting study leave should give their Head of Department reasonable notice that they intend to take the parenting study leave to allow WAM planning. This would normally be at the time of informing the Head of Department about the intention to take a family-friendly leave, and no later than the start date of eligible family-friendly leave.

Members of staff who intend to take parenting study leave need to apply by submitting SPE's Study Leave Application form (i.e. form used to apply for standard study leave). This would normally be no later than the start date of the eligible family-friendly leave. As with Sabbatical leave, this form is submitted to the Head of Department and Head of School for approval for a formal period of leave.

As with a standard study leave, returning members of staff from parenting study leave must submit SPE's Study Leave Report form (i.e. form used to report on research activities carried out during standard study leave) to report on research activities undertaken when on leave. This report is submitted to the Head of School within one month of return from parenting study leave and will be kept on file for future reference.