

Written submission from the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) (MPD0007)

1. Introduction:

- 1.1. This document represents the written submission of evidence from the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) to the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee inquiry into pregnancy and maternity discrimination.
- 1.2. UCEA understands from the inquiry's terms of reference that the inquiry is particularly interested to learn from examples of good practice in this area, to help inform the Government as to how it can drive behavioural change. Accordingly UCEA's response focuses on this.
- 1.3. The Higher Education (HE) sector is known for having an excellent record of family friendly policies and practices, including support for working parents and pregnant employees. We believe there are a number of examples of such practice which would be of interest to other employers.
- 1.4. UCEA has commissioned surveys and data collection exercises both into specific issues such as shared parental leave and also on the full package of terms and conditions of employment offered by HE employers. This submission draws upon these sources, as well as examples of practice received from our own member institutions.

2. About UCEA and its members:

- 2.1. The Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) represents the views of higher education institutions (HEIs) across the UK in their capacity as employers.
- 2.2. UCEA is a membership body that encompasses 161 HEIs in the UK. As a membership organisation our mission is to represent, negotiate for, and promote the interests of UK HEIs as employers to all stakeholders.
- 2.3. Together HEIs employ some 395,780 people across 161 autonomous universities and higher education colleges in the UK. We have sought the views of our member HEIs in forming this submission.

3. Summary of UCEA's views

- 3.1. It is noted that the report jointly commissioned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Equality and

Human Rights Commission (EHRC) on “Experiences of mothers: pregnancy and maternity-related discrimination and disadvantage” (July 2015) found that mothers in the Education sector had better experiences of pregnancy than those in other sectors, such as Finance and Manufacturing.

- 3.2. UCEA believes, for the HE sector at least, that this is because both the pregnancy and post-pregnancy support provided by employers is strong. As the examples of sector and institutional level initiatives below show, employers in the sector have an excellent track record in offering support and family-friendly policies.
- 3.3. Maternity and paternity provisions in the sector compare very favourably with provision in employers in the UK economy as a whole. According to our survey research, 93.6 per cent of HEIs offer maternity pay provisions above statutory obligations compared to 28 per cent in the wider economy¹. Similarly, more than three-quarters (77.8 per cent) of HEIs offer paternity pay above statutory compared to 20 per cent in the wider economy.
- 3.4. Other examples of initiatives offered by HE employers at an institutional level include on-site childcare offerings and parental support networks. These and many other initiatives are detailed in section five of this document.
- 3.5. UCEA acknowledges that not all the initiatives undertaken by employers in HE will be applicable to employers in other sectors, because of the nature of the work that is prevalent within HE.
- 3.6. However, UCEA believes that there are many initiatives, including some at sector level, which may be readily transferable to other employers.
- 3.7. UCEA’s member employers see the provision of good pregnancy and post-pregnancy support as an investment which allows them to retain the skills of experienced staff and contribute to positive employee relations and engagement. Their policies in this regard are also integral to their commitment to equality and diversity and desire to support women’s careers. It is clear from the joint BIS/EHRC report on this issue that for some employers the provision of such support is all too often seen solely as a cost with little benefit analysis undertaken.

¹ The 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Study (WERS)
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-2011-workplace-employment-relations-study-wers>)

- 3.8. Encouraging and enabling the right mind-set across both managers and the HR functions of the employer is key to the success of the policies we identify in this submission.
- 3.9. In HE, the actions of individual employers have also been encouraged through a number of sector-level initiatives detailed in 4 below.

4. Sector-level initiatives

Athena SWAN

- 4.1. The Athena SWAN scheme is a charter set up by the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU). Launched in June 2005, the Athena SWAN charter recognises and celebrates good employment practices for women working in higher education and research. It aims to assist the recruitment, retention and promotion of women in the HE sector, both for academics and professional services staff.
- 4.2. Athena SWAN was originally aimed at encouraging the progression of female academics in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine (STEMM). From April last year, the scheme was expanded to cover employees (both academic and professional services staff) in all disciplines.
- 4.3. Employers can apply for gold, silver or bronze awards at either institutional- or departmental-level where they can demonstrate good practice in recruiting, retaining and promoting women in higher education. Awards are peer-assessed by other workers and leaders in the sector, and require institutions to implement a robust self-assessment process.
- 4.4. This award scheme has encouraged HEIs to adopt both active monitoring and clear action plans to advance the careers of women within their organisation, ensuring against pregnancy and maternity discrimination, and prompted a range of policies and initiatives, such as parental 'buddy' schemes, maternity mentoring schemes and maternity returner support schemes. Examples of these practices are detailed in section five of this document.
- 4.5. The Athena SWAN scheme is voluntary, though has been used by one funder as a requisite benchmark. It might be a potential template, if such a sector-level approach were suitable, to consider as an enabler to improve practices towards pregnant employees.

Sector-level benchmarking and surveys

- 4.6. UCEA has undertaken sector-level benchmarking to provide our member institutions with a database of terms and conditions that enables them to compare themselves with their competitors in the sector.
- 4.7. The data UCEA collected meant institutions could re-assess their rewards package, including in terms of how they support pregnant employees, and improve their offer to ensure it was competitive. This exercise also included an analysis of how the sector compares with the wider economy.
- 4.8. From the benchmarking we can see that maternity and paternity provisions in the sector compare very favourably with provision in the UK economy as a whole. According to our research, 93.6 per cent of HEIs offer maternity pay provisions above statutory obligations compared to 28 per cent in the wider economy² . Similarly, more than three-quarters (77.8 per cent) of HEIs surveyed offer paternity pay above statutory compared to 20 per cent in the wider economy.
- 4.9. UCEA has also surveyed its members on both shared parental leave and shared parental pay, in a separate exercise. Almost 60 percent of HE institutions provide shared parental pay matched to occupational maternity pay. The vast majority of HEIs (90.4 per cent) reported having taken steps to promote and/or communicate Shared Parental Leave and Shared Parental Pay policies to staff, most commonly through the institution's intranet, website, email and e-newsletter. UCEA believes this widely enhanced provision is unlikely to be matched in many other sectors.
- 4.10. Sector-level benchmarking is a very useful way for employers to compare themselves and ensure they are competitive with their reward offering, providing another potential route for employers to do more to prevent discrimination. The inquiry may wish to consider the encouragement of such approaches.

Working with trade unions

- 4.11. Another way in which the HE sector has encouraged family friendly employment practices is through joint working with employee and employer representatives. Employment practice, terms and conditions are matters for individual employers and there has been ongoing review and development of policies at

² Ibid.

institutional level undertaken in consultation with the trade unions recognised within individual HEIs.

- 4.12. In addition, there has been some sector-level joint work in recent years looking at equality issues, conducted under the umbrella of the sector's Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff (JNCHES).
- 4.13. A significant report on Gender Pay Gap produced in July 2015 outlined qualitative examples of good practice to understand better the nature of gender pay gaps where they exist, and identified through case studies examples of specific institution-level initiatives and interventions to address women's progression. Examples of the kind of interventions being taken by HE employers are presented in section five of this document.
- 4.14. The inquiry may wish to consider the usefulness of encouraging joint working between employers and their recognised trade unions and the positive impact this can have on employee trust in the fairness and effectiveness of employment practices.

5. Institution level initiatives

- 5.1. There are a number of initiatives individual employers can adopt to improve support for pregnant employees. Although not all employers will be able to implement some of the examples below, UCEA believes the examples listed showcase the kind of family-friendly arrangements HEIs have implemented for their staff.

Support and mentoring

- 5.2. A number of institutions have introduced specific support or mentoring schemes for expectant and new parents, to improve the transition back to working life following maternity or paternity leave. These range from "maternity mentoring schemes" for those returning from maternity leave to "lunch clubs" for parents and networking events.
- 5.3. Institutions also make extensive use of Keeping-in-Touch arrangements for women while they are on maternity leave.
- 5.4. One university is launching a "Mums and Bumps Club" so that expectant mothers and parents can provide peer support before and after maternity leave. The network will also provide feedback to inform future family friendly policies.

- 5.5. Another large institution runs a parent “buddying” scheme which helps staff to integrate back into work following maternity leave by pairing them with a mentor who has had a similar experience.
- 5.6. One institution offers a “Parents Network” enabling parents to share practical advice and guidance or help in adapting to any particular challenges. Recent topics have included the need to create more facilities for mothers who wish to breast-feed, and consideration of how parents of young children can be supported and not disadvantaged in relation to international travel opportunities.
- 5.7. A number of institutions have highlighted toolkits or checklists developed for staff and their managers to ensure that the needs of both employer and employee are being met before and after going on maternity leave.
- 5.8. Such schemes, as well as helping institutions achieve Athena SWAN awards, reduce the isolation and dislocation that many parents can feel when returning from maternity or paternity leave and allow such staff to feel valued and supported rather than penalised for either their absence or their return to work.

Flexible working

- 5.9. The provision of flexible working and policies to enable this is another important area of employment practice, with the HE sector having an excellent track record and examples of HEIs actively monitoring the effectiveness of their flexible work offerings to gauge their impact, for example on retention.

Pay and reward

- 5.10. According to UCEA’s research, 93.6 per cent of HEIs offer enhanced maternity pay provisions above statutory obligations compared to 28 per cent in the wider economy (WERS, 2011). Similarly, more than three-quarters (77.8 per cent) of HEIs surveyed offer paternity pay above statutory compared to 20 per cent in the wider economy.
- 5.11. One institution has identified from its monitoring that they have not lost a single member of academic staff following return from maternity leave in the last five years. They believe their generous maternity pay offering is a key reason for general low staff turnover in the three years following return from maternity leave.

- 5.12. Another institution has highlighted their 'Women Academic Returners' Programme' (WARP). This scheme provides up to £10,000 direct financial support for maternity returners, to help the individual minimise the impact of the extended leave on their research activities.
- 5.13. As mentioned previously, many HEIs have moved to an enhanced rate of payment for parents using the Shared Parental Leave policy, with Shared Parental Leave at the equivalent rate to Maternity Leave, minus two weeks' payment which is associated with leave that is required by law to be reserved for the mother or primary adopter.
- 5.14. Enhanced maternity pay offerings are reported as both welcomed by employees and valuable to employers as recruitment and retention tools.

Facilities

- 5.15. Many HEIs offer on-site childcare provision and some partner with nurseries in the local area. Although this is not feasible for all employers, respondents to our call for evidence felt that the provisions of such services was another way to make new parents feel supported by their employer.
- 5.16. One institution stated that they believed it was a major factor in reducing staff turnover and noted that their on-site childcare facility was consistently rated highly in staff surveys.
- 5.17. We are also aware of a frequently seen practice of providing breast-feeding facilities in the workplace. It is clear that the provision of such facilities is not always possible or affordable for many employers, including some of our own HE employers. However, larger employers may be in a better position to offer such facilities.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1. Not all employers will be able to adopt the practices detailed in this submission. However, we believe the evidence from the HE sector shows that there are many advantages to be gained from taking positive steps to treat mothers and parents well and that these can make a difference in preventing discrimination.

6.2. We believe that the initiatives outlined above show examples of a range of interventions and good practice open to employers and we trust that the inquiry will find the experiences of the HE sector helpful in its investigation of possible solutions to the issue of pregnancy and maternity discrimination.

April 2016