# Parental Leave

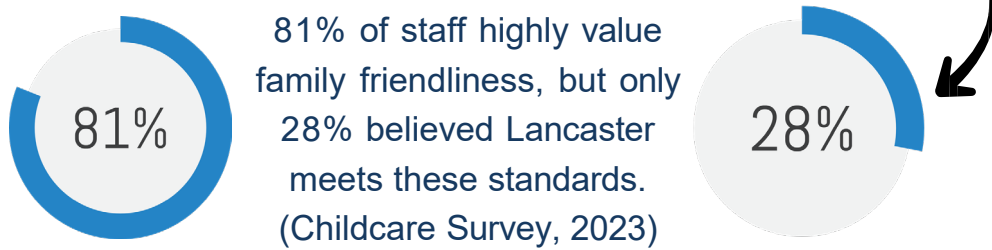## Action Plan Reference: MCFW3Checklists

Providing a clear, consistent set of centralised checklists to support both staff and managers throughout maternity, adoption, surrogacy and shared parental leave.

## Rationale

Parental leave is a significant transition, but staff at Lancaster University found the process inconsistent, confusing, and stressful. Policies were complicated, entitlements unclear, and support differed across departments. These issues mainly affected women and primary carers, risking gender inequality in career advancement, retention, and wellbeing. Staff felt anxious about entitlements, planning leave, and perceived a lack of support from managers who were uncertain. For managers, inconsistent guidance led to diverse responses, causing avoidable disparities and leaving staff experiences to chance.

## What we did

- Staff checklists – step-by-step support through leave application, entitlements, preparation, and return.
- Manager checklists – guidance for sensitive, informed conversations and consistent support.
- Created staff and manager checklists for maternity, adoption, surrogacy, and shared parental leave.
- Co-created with staff through workshops, focus groups, and interviews.
- Embedded into HR policy, guidance, and parental leave letters for consistency. Published online for visibility and accessibility.

**81%**

**28%**

81% of staff highly value family friendliness, but only 28% believed Lancaster meets these standards. (Childcare Survey, 2023)

The parental leave comms process is a stage-based timeline where each milestone automatically triggers tailored checklists for staff and managers to guide preparation, leave, and return-to-work actions.
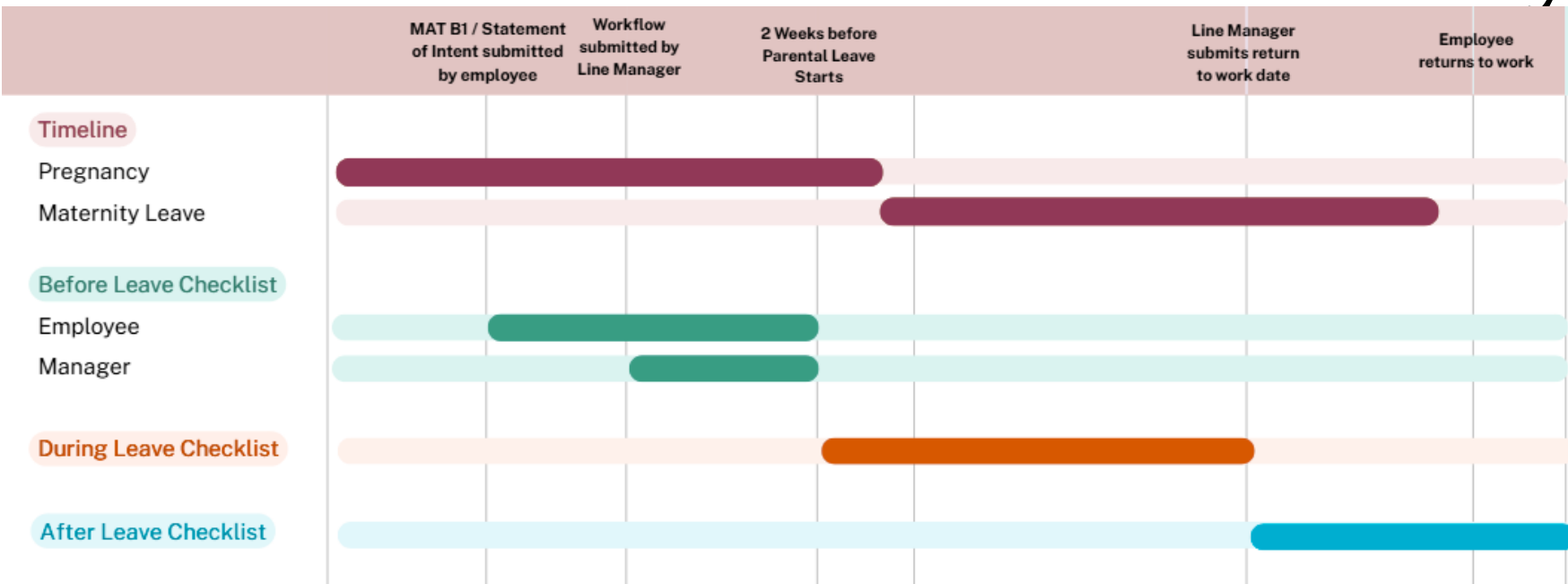
> "The checklists being developed are much better than the confusing pages I had to deal with."
>
> "I do see the progress, and I like this effort to simplify the whole process."
>
> "When you're already stressed and overwhelmed, anything that makes things easier is a huge relief."
>
> "I had to be super proactive… constantly chasing for information that should have been readily available."
>
> "My Line Manager had no idea what to do... I found myself chasing information and feeling that, in the midst of it all, my situation wasn't seen as a priority."

Key Insights from Focus Groups, 2025

### Cultural Change

**Consistency**
All Faculties and services now access the same information.

**Manager confidence**
Checklists have equipped managers to better support staff.

**Equity**
Reduces disparities by ensuring a consistent baseline of support.

**Inclusion**
Reinforces a family-friendly culture, aligned with Athena Swan principles.

| Timeline | MAT B1 / Statement of Intent submitted by employee | Workflow submitted by Line Manager | 2 Weeks before Parental Leave Starts | Line Manager submits return to work date | Employee returns to work |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pregnancy | | | | | |
| Maternity Leave | | | | | |
| **Before Leave Checklist** | | | | | |
| Employee | | | | | |
| Manager | | | | | |
| **During Leave Checklist** | | | | | |
| **After Leave Checklist** | | | | | |

## IMPACT

### What Worked Well

**Centralised guidance** — Consolidating multiple documents into simple checklists gave staff a single, reliable reference point.

**Co-creation** — Involving staff with lived experience ensured resources reflected real needs and challenges.

**Collaboration** — Partnership between HR, ASIG and the P&C Network balanced policy compliance with practical guidance.

**Automated release** — Linking checklists to key stages of parental leave ensured consistent, timely distribution and reduced admin burden.

**Positive feedback** — Early responses highlight the clarity and usefulness of the resources.

## Wider Integration

- Checklists are now embedded in all HR parental leave communications.
- Applied consistently across Faculties and Professional Services for a uniform approach.
- Support the Action Plan by embedding equity, inclusion, and wellbeing in daily practice.

## Challenges

- Inconsistent management: Staff experiences vary depending on managers' application.
- Use of tools: Helpful for clarity but risk becoming a tick-box exercise if not conversation-driven.
- Feedback and measurement: Largely informal, making long-term impact hard to assess.
- Emotional impact: The emotional aspects of leave, especially maternity, need greater recognition.

## Next Steps

- Feedback & monitoring: Introduce formal mechanisms to gather staff and manager feedback.
- Manager support: Provide training to equip managers for sensitive, supportive conversations.
- Centralised resources: Develop an HR "Family-Friendly Hub" to house all related materials.
- Review & adaptation: Update regularly in line with policy, staff needs, and best practice.
- Culture: Normalise checklist use so it becomes part of everyday practice.

### Find Out More

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Services - Maternity Leave | Staff Intranet

**Lancaster University**