

Academic Returner Policy and Procedure

1. Introduction and Purpose

- 1.1 As part of the University commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion, the University is proud to offer an Academic Returners Policy to support academic employees across the University to enhance their academic career trajectory on return from extended leave including family leave, sickness absence and career breaks.
- 1.2 The University recognises when employees take periods of extended leave it can be challenging to re-establish academic research and educational scholarship activity when they return to work and that career momentum can be impacted. Since educational scholarship and research activities are valued in terms of promotion and academic career progression, sometimes taking extended leave can delay individuals in their career development and have an unintended detrimental impact.
- 1.3 This policy aims to support academic employees, returning from extended leave of 6 months or more by providing funding to assist with relevant support, to develop their research and educational scholarship which is likely to have been impacted by the leave, enabling them to maintain their career trajectory and meet their professional goals and aspirations and the goals of the University.
- 1.4 The funding support available comprises two parts:
- 1.4.1 Funding to help prioritise research and scholarship activities with a minimum value equivalent to a part time (0.5FTE) Grade 6 for one semester. The funding can be flexibly adapted to individual needs and Faculties may approve longer durations or alternative FTE arrangements to align with specific circumstances.¹
- 1.4.2 Within the Faculty of Biology Medicine and Health specific funds for research, scholarship, and career profiling raising activity are additionally available to apply for. The Faculties of Science and Engineering and Humanities have other specific funding support for such activity and employees within these Faculties should contact their Line Manager or Head of School to discuss this further.
- 1.5 This policy sets out the relevant application procedure to access the required funding support.

¹ Based on 2025/2026 Pay Spine this minimum value equivalent would be £9430.00 for up to 6 months.

1.6 This policy and associated procedures are non-contractual and can be amended or updated at any time.

2. Scope

2.1 This policy and procedure is applicable to all academic employees whereby their contractual duties include educational scholarship and research activities who have been on, are currently on or are due to commence a period of leave, (specified below) which is over a 6-month continuous period. Research employees (employees on a substantive contract whose primary responsibility is to conduct research, typically supported by fixed-term grants) with grants of less than five years are not eligible but have access to a wide range of researcher development opportunities and may apply for research staff-specific funding schemes for dissemination and collaboration. However, those with funding grants of five years or more may be eligible to apply, subject to Head of School approval.

2.2 Employees on a fixed-term contract should hold a contract of employment for a sufficient period and no less than 12 months beyond the date of their application to permit the funds to be spent and to have an impact that increases the likelihood of securing a new or extended contract.

2.3 The following types of University leave which are relevant for this Policy are:

- [Adoption Leave Policy](#)
- [Career Break Policy](#)
- [Maternity Policy](#)
- [Shared Parental Leave Policy](#)
- [Sickness Absence Policy](#)

2.4 The leave must have lasted a minimum of 6 months (continuously) or for employees who have taken discontinuous Shared Parental Leave, such leave should equate to a minimum of 6 months in total.

2.5 Support for an ongoing disability will be considered as reasonable adjustments through the sickness absence policy utilising the advice and assistance of Occupational Health, the Disability Advisory and Support Service and appropriate external support agencies to identify appropriate solutions. This support route should be followed where the support involved is likely to be long term.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 It is the responsibility of managers to:

- advise eligible employees who are due to commence any period of extended leave as defined by 2.3 ideally no later than 3 months before the leave commences or as soon as possible upon the employees return from leave;
- advise eligible employees of the application process and the timescales as to which to apply within

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- Heads of Department/Head of School Operations should confirm the outcome of the application process to the employee;
- ensure that the employee submits the evaluation form once the funds have been utilised;
- independent of this policy, managers should engage with returning employees to discuss how best they can be supported during the initial return to work period following any extended leave.

3.2 It is the responsibility of employees to:

- engage with their line manager regarding an interest in submitting an application;
- complete the necessary application process within the timescales;
- complete the relevant evaluation forms upon utilisation of the funds.

3.3 It is the responsibility of the People Directorate to:

- ensure the Academic Returner Policy is accessible and relevant leave policies link to this scheme to ensure employees are aware of the policy when considering such extended periods of leave

3.4 It is the responsibility of the EDI Directorate to:

- Annually monitor all applications that have been submitted (including approved and non-approved applications and outcome of appeals) to identify any potential areas of inequality and appropriate action plans;
- Monitor the protected characteristics of applications received to identify any potential areas of inequality and appropriate action plans.

4. Application Procedure

4.1 The application process runs continuously throughout the academic year, however, applications can only be made by employees who have returned from the relevant leave within 12 months, are currently on or are due to go on related extended leave defined in section 2.3. Eligible employees are entitled to make more than one application.

4.2 An employee should complete the [Academic Returner Application Form](#)

4.3 A completed application will need to be approved by the following:

- Head of Department/Division

- Final approval by Head of School.

4.4 An employee will normally be informed by their Head of Department/Division or Head of School Operations of the outcome of the application within one month of the application being made.

4.5 Once an application is approved, the funding will be made available via the appropriate Faculty budget and expenditure of the funding should be drawn within 12 months of the successful application.

5. Appeals Process

5.1 If the application has not received the necessary approval, the employee will be informed and provided with the reason and the employee will be offered the right to appeal this decision.

5.2 The employee may appeal the decision within 10 working days of the decision being notified to them. The grounds for the appeal should be put in writing to the appropriate Director of People.

5.3 A suitable academic manager will hear the appeal which will normally be a manager from another school.

5.4 The appeal manager may, as they feel necessary, request further information and/or evidence, and may wish to meet with the employee and/or Head of Department and Head of School that considered the original application.

5.5 The appeal manager will make a final decision on whether the appeal should be allowed or rejected.

5.6 The appeal manager will notify the employee of the outcome of the appeal in writing within 10 working days of the appeal decision. Their decision will be final, and there will be no further right of appeal.

6. Evaluation

6.1 Evaluation is a critical element of the scheme ensuring the University can develop this policy and ensure that it meets its aim and objectives.

6.2 As a condition of the funding, successful applicants are required to complete an [Academic Returner 6 Month Evaluation Form](#) outlining the benefits of the policy, how the funding was utilised and how the funding supported their career advancement specifically highlighting any outputs such as publications, grants etc. This should be completed within **six months** of the funding being utilised.

6.3 The Head of Department should also contribute to the evaluation process and provide any relevant feedback to the initial evaluation form and any subsequent ongoing evaluation updates.

6.4 Any specific updates as to how the funding has benefited the individual should be submitted as part of a relevant ongoing evaluation process.

6.5 If an employee has successfully applied and accessed support via this policy, they should include this as part of their evidence for promotion to ensure the relevant panel is aware and can consider this alongside individual circumstances as part of their overall promotion application.

7. Monitoring Compliance

7.1 All applications and outcomes of appeals will be logged and will be reported on an annual basis to the EDI Committee to ensure the procedure is transparent, fair and enable an opportunity to identify any potential inequalities and appropriate action where necessary. The annual reporting will also include a high-level overview of the summary of the self-evaluations received.

7.2 The EDI Directorate may request additional feedback from employees who have utilised the scheme to enable additional evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of this scheme over a longer-term period.

7.3 The University will also endeavor to monitor the career progression of employees who have utilised the scheme and compare against employees who have not engaged in such periods of leave to analyse the impact upon career trajectory and report upon any salient conclusions.

6. Policy Content

Document control box	
Policy / Procedure title:	Academic Returners Policy and Procedure
Lead contact email	Policy Manager – brooke.foulger@manchester.ac.uk
Date updated:	August 2025
Approving body:	University Executive
Version:	2
Supersedes:	N/A
Previous review dates:	January 2024
Next review date:	January 2027
Equality impact outcome:	Low
Related Statutes, Ordinances, General Regulations:	

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Related policies/procedures/guidance etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption Leave • Career Break • Maternity Leave • Shared Parental Leave • Sickness Absence • Promotion of Academics Policy
Policy owner:	People Directorate
Lead contact:	Policy Manager