

MUM FRIENDLY WORKPLACES ✓



A GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

PRACTICAL SUPPORT
AND INFORMATION
FOR EMPLOYERS

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MUMS RETURN TO WORK?

Many women are unaware of their maternity rights or of the supports available to them. Returning to work after such a revolutionary event can be challenging, with major impacts on family lives.

Every year in the UK, as many as

54,000

mums feel that they have to leave their jobs

77%

of mums say they have had a negative or discriminatory experience during pregnancy, maternity leave, and/or on return from maternity leave

1 in 5

mums (20% or up to 100,000 women) said that they experienced negative comments or harassment in relation to flexible working or pregnancy

In partnership with early years childcare providers, Outside the Box has produced this guide and online training to inform businesses on the practical steps to support mums returning to work.

**For more information visit:
www.mumsreturningtowork.org**

MUMS WORKING IN CHILDCARE

The childcare sector is expanding in response to growing demand due to women returning to work after having children. The success of these businesses relies on creating a family-friendly working environment – a particular challenge for the sector given across Scotland, 97% of childcare and early years workers are women.

Outside the Box is working in partnership with early years childcare businesses to share good practice and develop workplace training that supports mums back into the workplace after maternity.

Our partners, The Indigo Group and The Cadzow Nursery School employ a predominately female workforce. Both are keen to explore how their business policies and practice support mums returning to work.

The Indigo Childcare group

Indigo is a social enterprise, operating as a limited company with charitable status, providing early learning and childcare solutions, from birth up to the age of 16. Their aim is to provide services that give the best possible start in life to children and young people and a platform for improved life chances as they grow. indigogrp.com

The Cadzow Nursery School

Cadzow Nursery School is a private business, providing an early learning environment for babies to pre-school age children. It is dedicated to creating a facility where all children feel appreciated, valued and supported to reach their full potential. cadzownursery.co.uk



The Indigo Childcare Group



The Cadzow Nursery School



“We are committed to ensuring that children and families are at the heart of every decision we make. We recognise that to ensure we secure the best outcomes for our children and young people, it is essential that we also nurture and support our staff team. This approach is creating a more confident, loyal and committed workforce. In the last year alone, we have retained 100% of our staff who have become new parents, avoiding the costs and impact on quality of having to recruit and train new people.”

Jacqueline Lamb, Chief Executive Officer of Indigo Childcare Group

Leanne Kelly
Nursery manager



“Supporting the wellbeing of staff first and foremost ensures staff feel valued and supported as individuals as well as employees. This approach has had a profound effect on retention and recruitment of staff. Supporting our staff has a positive effect on our business – staff are more willing to be accommodating and flexible to the needs of the business. We try to accommodate the needs of mums returning to work as much as possible. Mums bring life skills and life-learning that can be utilised in different ways.”

Leanne Kelly, Manager of The Cadzow Nursery

Magda's story, Nursery Practitioner The Cadzow Nursery



The last nursery I worked in wasn't supportive – they wouldn't let you off if your child was sick. I would dread having to phone in because they would make you feel terrible. When I had my second daughter the nursery said I hadn't been back long enough to get maternity pay from them. And they didn't give me the notice I needed to get statutory pay. I ended up in rent arrears, I lost my house and ended up with depression and anxiety. I was homeless with two wee girls. I'd worked at that nursery since I was 16, but was treated so badly.

Culture

The experience resulted in my being away from work for five years, until I went to classes that helped build my confidence. I applied for the job at Cadzow Nursery and never looked back. I think it makes a huge difference that our manager understands if you have family commitments – if the school phones, I can go – your kids come first. They make sure there's enough cover if you do need the time.

Wellbeing

My wellbeing is supported at Cadzow, my confidence and self-esteem are much better. We are valued in team meetings; they have an understanding of who you are and what you're good at. Being told you're good at your job makes a huge difference.

Support

We have an 'open door' policy and I trust my manager and feel safe here. I don't need to worry. If things do change in my private life, I can talk to my manager in the knowledge it'll be okay. Even though I suffer from anxiety, I know I won't be brushed off or made to feel worse. We are supportive as a whole team and can discuss working patterns any time.

Transferable skills

We understand how mums feel when they are handing their kids over. Mums prefer it when you are a mum yourself. You understand their perspective because you've done it too.

Amira's story, Finance Officer The Indigo Childcare Group



I came to Indigo when my son was two. I had previously worked for a local authority, but I didn't want to return there after my maternity. I was given a disciplinary for being off with terrible morning sickness and was told I had to come in to sit on reception regardless of being frequently sick. I recently had to take eight weeks off when my son broke his leg. Work let me come in for a few hours when I could to get some work done and I could take my laptop home and work there. This meant life was much easier for me and I was able to go to appointments.

Access to work

As an employee, I get a staff discount on childcare which makes a huge difference. I really like working near my son. As a mum whose child comes to the nursery, I feel I can make suggestions which helps improve the service. There are a lot of mum returners here and most of our staff are female. If your personal circumstances change, all you need to do is write a letter to the manager and explain what's going on. The manager will look at it and grant the things you need, like working flexibly or just during term-time. During school holidays you can work half the week and split this with a colleague to work the other half.

Wellbeing

While I was off with my son, I knew my job was secure and my work wasn't building up because I could work when I could – this made a huge difference to me at a stressful time. I was kept in the loop, so I knew exactly what was happening with parents, internal jobs etc, which made coming back a lot easier and reduced stress. I was grateful that I didn't have to worry that I might lose my job.

Being valued

I don't know what I would have done if I'd still been working in my previous job when my son broke his leg, I probably would've had to go on long-term sick or have lost my job. I feel 100% valued here and anything bad that's happened in my personal life, I've always been supported with at work.

The bottom line for working families

The cost and availability of childcare is a major issue for families, particularly for mums returning to work. Many are unable to afford to return to work on a full-time basis as a result of having to pay significant fees towards childcare.

Only 25% of councils in Scotland report they have enough childcare for every parent working full-time. That figure is even lower for parents of disabled children.

The bottom line for business

The average yearly salary of a Nursery Practitioner sits around £14-17,000 per year, making it virtually impossible to afford to place a child in nursery, even on a part-time basis, to be enabled back to work. This means there is a gap for businesses in being able to access skilled workers who are qualified to provide childcare for working families.

Policy does not always meet practice in supporting mum returners. There is a lot of information out there to support employers to understand maternity rights and returning to work but even with the best of intentions the challenge is how to make this fit with business need.

The wellbeing of a whole workforce can be affected when policy does not meet with day to day practice. The cost to business is often high levels of absenteeism and high staff turnover.

If businesses are not responsive to support mums returning to work, they risk the cost of prolonged or extended maternity leave, losing skilled staff and high recruitment costs coupled with the time it takes to train new staff. This can have a negative impact on long-term business plans and revenue.

THE BENEFITS

Putting into practice flexible and practical working solutions is of huge benefit to businesses like the Cadzow Nursery and Indigo Group. Despite having a predominately female workforce, set hours and strict staff ratios, they have been able to negotiate a working culture where staff feel valued and deliver a successful service as a result.

Mum returners in both contexts are given childcare discounts for nursery placements. This has encouraged staff to increase their usage of the services and has therefore increased revenue and income for the businesses. This helps attract new staff coming on board, contributing to a stronger recruitment process.

The discounted rate facilitates mums returning to work because it offers a clearer and simpler process for them, meaning less juggling. Providing a steady childcare option means mums are happy and more confident at work knowing the quality of care and the learning their children are experiencing. There is less risk of informal arrangements falling through causing the employee to be absent from work – a financial and a quality cost to the business.

Being approachable as a manager sets a tone that respects employees as a ‘whole person’ with a life and responsibilities past work, encouraging workers to be invested in the business. Mum returners told us this made them more willing to offer overtime and be flexible in return. This is of particular importance when the business relies on providing a childcare service delivered by women with families. An expectation of flexibility both ways - from employer and employee - is an effective way of balancing needs at both ends of the scale.

10 things you as an employer can do to make your work place more ‘mum friendly’

Practical tips for turning policy into practice.

- 1** **Go beyond** an ‘open door’ policy – ask staff how they are at a time and place when they can answer sincerely.
- 2** Make **check-ins** a regular thing and adopt different ways to approach this.
- 3** Encourage work-based **social support** throughout the staff team.
- 4** **Give time to settle back in** – be it through a phased return or managing workloads.
- 5** Recognise and be active in **promoting new opportunities** for your workforce.
- 6** **Take an interest**, tell people what they’re doing well, that you value them.
- 7** Support and **respect wellbeing** for individual workers and the team as a whole.
- 8** **Value skills** that mums can bring to help shape workplace practice.
- 9** Be committed to **opportunities for learning** throughout the staff team.
- 10** **Be flexible** in the knowledge that it’s more likely you will retain good staff.

Employers across different sectors shared that having an in-built equalities approach starting from recruitment meant that all roles can be advertised as gender neutral, flexible, with a family friendly focus – including carers.

Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of employees is seen as crucial in embedding positive working practice. Taking on a sincerely flexible working environment means treating your employees with trust, allowing the space for them to participate in shaping how flexible working can benefit them and the overall work of the business.

SHINING LIGHTS



Examples of good practice from our partners

Flexible working

Term-time/part-time contacts/condensed hours/days swap.
Open door to requests including long-term changes and emergency support.

Holidays

Staff have option to buy extra holidays in addition to annual leave entitlement.

Leadership

Promoting and supporting staff skills via continued training and learning opportunities.
Offering solution based support on an individual and team basis.

25% Childcare discount

All staff offered discount to support women back from maternity.

Breast feeding friendly

Nursery has allocated spaces throughout for staff and customers to breast feed.
Safe, clean spaces allocated to express and store milk.

Wellbeing

Workers wellbeing is placed at the forefront of each level of business planning.

Nursery app

Company app all staff can access to keep up to date with nursery news and opportunities.

SHINING LIGHTS



Examples of good practice from our partners

Staff discount

All permanent staff receive a 10% discount on the subsidised childcare rate.

Ad hoc

Staff have the option to use additional days for their children if needed (based on availability) at the discounted rate.

A learning organisation

Commitment to lifelong learning across the organisation, underpinned by a culture of leadership at every level.

As a learning organisation, there is a focus on innovation through continual new learning opportunities and experiences for individuals but also aligned with the strategic focus of the organisation.

Regular check ins

Monthly Manager drop ins where a different manager each month is present in a different service to chat about anything any individual wishes to raise.

Managers plan events to support staff's wellbeing such as 'its good to talk' tea party (additional tea breaks where staff are encouraged not to use their phones and to chat with each other).

NHS Top Up Corporate Health Plan

All permanent staff can sign up to the scheme as well as partners and children to get money back on routine health care such as dental and optician costs and other health related costs e.g. therapies.

Flexible working

Term-time and part-time contracts/condensed hours/home working/ days swap.

Open door policy to support all requests including long-term changes and emergency support.



If you'd like your workplace to have the mum friendly stamp visit www.mumsreturningtowork.org for information on our training and certification.

Having a mum friendly workplace not only boosts your equalities practice but makes good business sense.

Outside the Box offers bespoke workplace training.

Connect with us

#mumfriendlyworkplace



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We'd like to thank our partners The Indigo Childcare Group, The Cadzow Nursery school and their employees for sharing their experience and time with us to make this publication possible.



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