

Measures to Support the Return of Employees After Long-Term Absence from Work

Introduction

Returning to research work after an extended break can be challenging—not only organizationally, but also in terms of reintegrating into a dynamic scientific environment. Considering the specific nature of research work, the changing composition of research teams, and the cyclical nature of grant funding, we are introducing systematic and standardized measures to facilitate and accelerate the return of our employees following long-term absence from work and to support the sustainable development of their subsequent career.

These measures are primarily intended to support employees returning from predictable long-term absences, particularly those related to maternity leave, parental leave, or caring responsibilities for a close family member. At the same time, this document reflects the broader principle that long-term absences may occur for a variety of reasons, including prolonged illness, injury, unpaid leave, study leave, long-term stays abroad, public or political service, or military training.

The Institute recognizes that the reasons for long-term absence cannot always be anticipated. Therefore, whenever possible, any long-term or expected long-term absence should be communicated in advance to the employee's line manager and the HR Office. Early communication makes it possible to establish an appropriate level of contact during the absence and to prepare the most suitable arrangements for the employee's smooth reintegration into the workplace upon their return.

The measures described in this document are applied to the extent appropriate to the nature of the particular long-term absence and the operational needs of the Institute.

The measures are implemented in four phases:

- Before the start of long-term absence,
- During long-term absence,
- Before returning to employment,
- After returning to employment.

1. Measures Before the Start of Long-Term Absence

The objective of measures in this phase is to provide practical information useful during extended absence, prior to commencing long-term leave—specifically due to maternity or parental reasons, long-term sick leave, or care for a close person.

The HR Office will provide the following information:

- What documentation and deadlines the departing employee must deliver to the Institute for smooth processing of benefits by the District Social Security Administration (OSSZ).
- How and when to apply for subsequent parental leave (in case the reason for absence is maternity or parental leave).
- What obligations the departing employee has toward their health insurance company.

- What options for contact, benefits, or a gradual return to work the Institute offers during this period.
- What the applicable statutory deadlines are for guaranteeing a return to the original job position and workplace, as well as deadlines for guaranteed placement in accordance with the agreed type of work (in case the reason for absence is maternity or parental leave).

2. Measures During Long-Term Absence from Work

The objective of measures in this phase is to prevent feelings of isolation during long-term absence and to provide these employees with support:

- **Maintaining full access to information:** Employees on long-term absence are not excluded from mass mailing lists and retain full access to the intranet. They receive the same information as other employees, including invitations to educational, social, and professional events (training, professional seminars, Institute-wide seminar, seminar for early-career researchers, Director's New Year address, Christmas party, summer garden party, meetings with international staff, etc.), and have access to minutes from Director's Board meetings, the Institute newsletter, and intranet news updates.
- **Regular communication with employees on parental leave:** At least once a year, the HR Office will send an email to employees on parental leave with information regarding available services of the Children's Groups of the Czech Academy of Sciences (Dětské skupiny AV ČR) for preschool childcare, and will inquire about the employee's interest in part-time work during parental leave. *(Note: The ideal time frame for this communication is between November and March, when applications for preschool childcare facilities are submitted.)*
- **Joint meeting with parents on maternity or parental leave:** Once a year, the HR Office will organize a joint meeting with parents to discuss their current or future professional needs and plans, and to answer any questions.

3. Measures Prior to Return to Work

The objective of measures in this phase is to prepare the employee on long-term absence and their department for the return to work.

If an employee on long-term absence expresses an interest in part-time work, or sufficiently in advance of their planned return (if the return date is known) from long-term absence, the HR Office will take the following steps:

- Inform the relevant head of department/laboratory that the employee on long-term absence could engage in work tasks.
- Request that the head propose a plan for reintegrating the returning employee into the team and identify suitable job positions (with workload and job content matching the returning employee's needs as closely as possible).
- Send the returning employee an information packet containing:
 - an overview of current benefits relevant to returning employees (remote work, flexible working hours, the option to request part-time work, CAS children's groups, etc.),
 - information on internal and external return grants (see below),

- a list of positions matching their professional profile (in the event of the unavailability of the original position after the expiration of the statutory guarantee period for the identical job position and workplace),
- a list of internal vacancies for which external recruitment of new employees is not anticipated,
- an offer to request a voluntary mentor (see section 4.4).

Information on vacancies is gathered by the HR Office in cooperation with heads of departments and project principal investigators. If the returning employee is interested in a specific position, the HR Office will facilitate contact with the respective team leader. If the returning employee has arranged their own placement within the team they originally left, they will inform the HR Office of this fact.

4. Measures After the Return to Work

The objective of measures in this phase is to support the reintegration of the returning employee into the work process. The following measures are available:

4.1 Support for Re-engagement in Independent Research

The returning employee may apply for a one-year internal project of the Institute of Thermomechanics to bridge a period without grant funding (the application deadline is always January 10). Currently, returning employees are not automatically given preference during proposal evaluation; however, in the internal project proposal form under "Scope and objectives of the proposed project," the applicant's special circumstances may be stated—for instance, the interest in using the internal project for reintegration into a scientific team after a long-term career break.

The returning employee may also apply for a grant from a national funding agency designed to support researchers returning to work after an extended career break, e.g., [Czech Science Foundation \(GA ČR\) Restart Grants](#) or the [Martina Roeselová Memorial Fellowship](#) awarded by the IOCB Foundation to early-career scientists caring for a preschool-aged child.

4.2 Option to Request a Temporary Reduction in Working Hours

Returning employees may, pursuant to the Collective Agreement (Article II.9.5), request a temporary reduction in working hours (part-time schedule). The request is submitted to the Director of the Institute for review.

Note: In addition to the aforementioned measure arising from the Collective Agreement, employees providing long-term care to other persons or parents of young children may request an adjustment of working hours or remote work under the conditions set out in Sections 241 and 241a of Act No. 262/2006 Coll. (the Labor Code).

4.3 Option to Request an Increase in the Maximum Monthly Days for Remote Work (Telework)

Returning employees who are eligible for remote work and have concluded a remote work agreement with the Institute may request an increase in the maximum monthly number of remote work days corresponding to their employment FTE. The request is submitted to the Director of the Institute for review via an updated record sheet (an annex to the remote work agreement).

4.4 Mentoring

Although the Institute does not currently have formalized institutional mentoring rules, mentoring is being incorporated as a key development tool for career building among early-career researchers under the OP JAK Research Environment project of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The same mentoring principles can be applied to returning employees.

If a returning employee expresses an interest in mentoring, the HR Office, in cooperation with the head of the relevant department/laboratory, will assess options for its implementation. Where feasible, the specific scope and framework of mentoring support will be agreed upon with the returning employee.

Depending on the needs of the returning employee, mentoring support may cover areas such as:

- Orientation in current research trends and topics within the field.
- Guidance on preparing grant proposals (including funding programs targeted at researchers returning after career breaks).

4.5 One-Year Feedback

One year after the return, the HR Office will send the returning employee a questionnaire aimed at gathering feedback on their post-return work situation, including achievements and any potential difficulties.

5. Conclusion

This document is continuously updated to reflect changing conditions and opportunities.