



Human  
Resources



# FERTILITY POCKET GUIDE

A guide for  
employees and  
managers on the  
fertility journey

# Introduction

This pocket guide has been created as a quick reference guide for employees and managers on good practice approaches to supporting individuals who are experiencing fertility issues.

At LSE, we recognise that the fertility journey can be a difficult one, with significant impacts on staff wellbeing. Providing support in the workplace can have a positive and meaningful effect on those facing fertility challenges.

LSE is committed to fostering a supportive, inclusive, and open culture, offering support to staff undergoing fertility investigations and treatments. Since every fertility journey is unique, it is recognised that the support that is required will vary from one person to another.

The fertility journey involves not only the treatment phase but also an investigative phase, which includes exams, tests and appointments to try and understand what may be the cause of infertility and discuss various treatment options.

Time away from work may be required for the investigative appointments prior to the start of treatment and during the treatment. In some cases, the side effects of the treatment itself may mean the individual is unable to work.

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# Time Away From Work

Whilst there is no statutory right to time off in connection with fertility investigations or treatments, any fertility-related appointment should be treated as any other medical appointment. In the case of IVF, a person is deemed to be pregnant from the point of implantation of the fertilised egg in the uterus. Therefore, from that time, staff are legally protected from pregnancy and maternity discrimination and will have the right to time off to attend antenatal care. The protected period ends when the individual returns to work after maternity leave or at the end of the period of two weeks beginning with the end of the pregnancy (i.e., in the case of IVF, if the pregnancy test, usually taken two weeks after implantation, is negative, the protection period will elapse two weeks after that date).

Employees who are facing fertility challenges are encouraged to discuss their needs and arrangements for investigative and treatment appointments with their managers. Managers should, wherever operationally possible, demonstrate flexibility regarding how related appointments can be accommodated (e.g., allowing staff to work from home on the day of the appointment, considering earlier/later start/finish times).

Like any other medical appointment, appointments for investigation and treatment of fertility issues should normally be arranged outside of normal working hours. It is recognised that, with fertility-related appointments, there may be multiple appointments often arranged with very little notice. Where these can't be arranged outside of normal working hours, flexible

working options (i.e. late/early working hours, working from home) should be explored to allow staff to attend these.

It is likely that people may also need time off from work and/or adjustments after the treatment cycle to recover and/or increase the chances of success. If an employee is off sick due to the side effects of fertility treatment, the usual provisions under the sickness absence procedure should be followed.

Alternative leave arrangements, such as annual leave or other types of special leave (such as compassionate leave) should be considered where additional time is required. In some circumstances, it might be appropriate to explore the option of unpaid leave.

A summary of these provisions is provided below:

Flexible working	This is encouraged throughout the fertility journey (e.g., working from home on the day of an appointment, later/earlier start/finish times)
Medical appointment	To investigate infertility, consult on treatment options, and any other appointment scheduled during the fertility journey (e.g., collecting ova, embryo implantation)
Sickness absence	Used to recover from any negative effects of treatment and / or illness as a result of fertility treatment
Annual leave or other special leave (e.g., compassionate leave, unpaid leave)	This should be used as appropriate where additional time off is required

# Guidance for employees

We understand that discussing fertility challenges with managers may be difficult for some staff. This can be for various reasons, ranging from the fear that confidentiality may be breached, that career prospects may be affected or that this would not be taken seriously. At LSE, we want to create an open and inclusive culture where staff feel comfortable sharing the challenges they are facing. Managers are expected to provide support and make reasonable adjustments where necessary.

If fertility issues, and the related investigations or treatment, are affecting your work or overall wellbeing, we encourage you to consider discussing this with your manager. If you feel uncomfortable approaching your manager directly, you may wish to speak with your HR partner or another trusted colleague who can provide support and help to facilitate discussions. Keep in mind that it's entirely up to you how much you wish to disclose, and you should never feel pressured to share more than you are comfortable with. On the other hand, informing your manager can help them understand your situation and provide appropriate support.

Together, you can discuss your specific needs and agree on next steps, such as adjustments to your ways of working to help you balance work responsibilities with the demands of fertility treatments or investigations. There are a wide range of flexible working options available. For further guidance, please refer to the Flexible Working Policy and Toolkit, which

provides resources to promote effective and supportive work arrangements.

If your manager is aware of your situation, they can offer support in several ways. Below are some general considerations and things you may wish to discuss with your manager:

- Whilst it is recognised that, with fertility-related appointments, there may be multiple appointments often arranged with very little notice, as with other medical appointments, you should try to arrange these outside of normal working hours where possible. Where this is not possible, flexible working options (e.g. late/early working hours, working from home) should be considered.
- If you need to take sickness absence due to the side effects of fertility treatment, the usual provisions under the sickness absence procedure would apply.
- If you require additional time off, you might wish to discuss with your manager alternative leave arrangements, such as annual leave or other types of special leave (such as compassionate leave). In some circumstances, it might be appropriate to explore the option of unpaid leave.
- If your partner is going through fertility investigations and treatment, and you need time off to support them, annual leave would normally be used. However, you may wish to discuss and explore with your manager any flexible working options that would allow you to attend appointments. If your presence is required as part of the treatment process, this should be treated as a medical appointment.
- If you wish for other colleagues to be aware of your need for flexibility, your manager can help facilitate these discussions should you require this.

# Guidance for line managers

As a manager, you play a vital role in supporting staff who are facing fertility challenges and undergoing related investigations and treatments.

Since every fertility journey is unique, it is important to provide flexible and thoughtful support tailored to individual circumstances. The appropriate level of support will vary depending on the employee's specific needs and the nature of their role.

The time an employee may need away from work will depend on the nature of the tests, treatments and the recovery post-treatment as well as the location and scheduling of their appointments. Offering flexible and creative solutions to accommodate medical appointments and post-treatment needs can significantly ease the process for the employee and strengthen the manager-employee relationship.

There are several ways in which you can support your staff.

## ■ Below are some considerations and suggestions that you may find helpful:

- Build a relationship based on trust, encouraging staff to share what they feel comfortable with. Avoid pressuring them to disclose more than they wish, but remain open and listen actively, so they feel able to talk to you about their need for support or workplace adjustments.
- Treat any information with sensitivity and confidentiality and let the employee know that you won't share details of their treatment.
- Be open, receptive and understanding. Take the time to get to the root of the individual's needs and think creatively about solutions that could make their journey easier.
- Remember that you are not expected to be a counsellor or medical expert. Your role is to support staff as much as possible in their work. If you feel the employee requires additional support, please refer them to the resources listed in the Fertility Toolkit.
- Be flexible! Where possible, consider allowing the individual to work from home on the day of the appointment or adjust their start/finish times.
- Be creative in finding a solution that supports the employee whilst ensuring that operational needs are met. Each fertility journey is unique, so even if you've successfully supported someone in the past, the same approach may not be the most appropriate with another individual. Be prepared to listen to their needs and adapt the support where any adjustments are needed along the way.
- Manage absence and leave with compassion. Keep in mind that staff experiencing fertility challenges may be dealing with physical and also emotional difficulties. If additional time off is needed, discuss the possibility of alternative leave arrangements such as annual leave, unpaid leave or compassionate leave where appropriate.
- Be mindful that often people need to go through more than one round of treatment; the success rate of fertility treatments varies depending on several factors and not all cycles will be successful. Going through repeat cycles can add to the physical and emotional strain involved.

- Remember that fertility issues can affect anyone, regardless of their gender.
- There may be staff that wish to take time off work to support a partner – including same-sex partners – undergoing fertility investigations and treatment. Whilst staff would normally be expected to take annual leave, consider offering flexible working options where possible. However, if the employee's presence is required as part of the treatment process, this should be treated like any other medical appointment.
- Be mindful that for some people undergoing fertility issues, it can be deeply challenging to hear about other people's pregnancies or babies. If you are aware that someone within your team has experienced, or is currently experiencing fertility challenges, be particularly sensitive as to how to certain news is shared and how family-related events, such as babies visiting the office or organising maternity/paternity gifts are handled.

# Further Resources

## Resources to support staff undergoing fertility treatment

LSE is committed to providing support to staff undergoing fertility treatment. You can find useful information in other parts of the Fertility Support Toolkit, including the FAQs document and case studies. In addition, below are internal and external resources, key points of contacts, and reference points, which you may find useful:

- **Staff Counselling** is a free and confidential service for LSE staff to discuss a problem or situation which is causing concern or distress.
- The **Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)** provides staff with access to confidential support on all aspects of wellbeing.
- **HR Partners** are available to support you and discuss any concerns you may have.
- **LSE Staff Groups and Networks**
- The **Flexible Working Toolkit** provides in-depth guidance about how to introduce and maintain flexible working arrangements that can enable staff to better balance their work and personal circumstances.
- As part of the School's promotion of an enabling and inclusive environment for all, the **Dignity at Work Statement** clarifies expectations of conduct and positive behaviour, as well as setting out the means by which inappropriate behaviour can be easily identified, addressed and resolved.
- **Sickness Absence Toolkit**, includes information and guidance for employees and managers on sickness absence management at the School.
- **Fertility Network UK** is a charity that provides free and impartial support, advice, information and understanding for anyone affected by fertility issues. Please see below links to the specific support available:
  - **Fertility Support Groups** offer a chance to chat and share experiences with others. These include UK wide specialist groups and regional groups.
  - **Support and Information Line** is a free service run by two former fertility nurses, and offers a unique fertility support service.
  - **HIMFertility** pages provide information and support for men affected by fertility issues.
- **Fertility Matters at Work** is a Community Interest Company (CIC) dedicated to improving fertility support at work.
- **The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority** is the UK's independent regulator of fertility treatment and research using human embryos
- **Fertility Friends** is an online infertility and fertility support community in the UK, exploring a wide range of topics such as experiences and issues relating to infertility, adoption, and parenting after infertility.
- **Aching Arms**, a charity that offers help and support after pregnancy and baby loss.
- **Tommy's Charity**, the largest UK charity researching the causes and prevention of pregnancy complications, miscarriage, stillbirth and premature birth. They offer advice and support during pregnancy, as well as baby loss support.
- **NHS website** provides detailed information on infertility, including causes, diagnosis and treatment.



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