



Northern Ireland Ambulance Service
Health and Social Care Trust



PARENTAL LEAVE SCHEME



1. Introduction

The Government introduced the statutory right to parental leave on 15 December 1999 by bringing in regulations which set out entitlement to Parental Leave. The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust has its own Parental Leave Scheme, the terms of which are more generous than the statutory provisions, as part of its commitment to family friendly initiatives. The Trust acknowledges the needs of parents who need to take leave to look after their child or to make arrangements for the good of their child. It is committed to providing flexible options which will enable staff to balance both their caring and work commitments.

A new European Directive 2010/18/EU has been adopted by the Northern Ireland Executive which increases the amount of parental leave an employee can request. The change in entitlement from 13 weeks to 18 weeks is effective from 8th March 2013.

2. Parental Leave – A Definition

Parental Leave is taken to look after a child or to make arrangements for the good of a child. The reasons for the leave need not be connected with a child's health, for example, a parent may wish to take parental leave to settle a child at a new play group.

Parental leave is **unpaid** and staff who qualify will have the right to a total of **18** weeks unpaid leave (pro-rata for part-time staff) for each child who meets the eligibility criteria of the Trust's Scheme.

Parental leave is available to employees who have caring responsibilities for a child up to the age of 14 (age 18 in the case of adopted or disabled children).

Parental Leave is an addition to other types of Special Leave, including Adoption Leave and Carers Leave.

3. Eligibility

In respect of Parental Leave, "qualifying parents" are those who have a child under the age of five (or under the age of 18 if the child has a disability) and have had at least one year's continuous service with the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service. They must also either be the parent:

- * named on the child's birth certificate;
- * named on the child's adoption certificate; or
- * have legal parental responsibility for the child.



4 Key Terms of the Scheme

- i. The 18 week entitlement is provided for each child dependant on the eligibility criteria being met. Consequently, in the case of multiple births there will be a separate entitlement for each child.
- ii. Although the leave is **unpaid** the employee will remain an employee of the Trust during the Parental Leave period and will be bound by all normal contractual regulations regarding good faith, conduct, confidentiality, etc.
- iii. Periods of Parental Leave do not affect the employee's normal annual leave entitlement. There will be no entitlement to any statutory days which fall within the period(s) during which the employee is off.
- iv. Parental Leave must be taken in manageable blocks of not less than one week at a time. Any period of less than one week will still count as one week.
- v. It is the responsibility of an employee wishing to pursue Parental Leave to consult with the Salaries and Wages Department regarding the reductions in his/her income, and to consult the local Social Security Office regarding National Insurance Contributions and any entitlements. Information on pension may be obtained from HSC Pensions Branch, Waterside House, Londonderry, Telephone 028 70 319 000
- vi. An employee on Parental Leave will be eligible to apply for promotion in the normal way. It is the employee's responsibility to check the NIAS website and www.HSCrecruit.com to review job advertisements, etc., and to advise his/her Line Manager and the Human Resources Department of any change in address.
- vii. In the event that both parents of a child are employed by the Trust, they are not entitled to transfer their entitlement from one to the other.
- viii. Following a period of Parental Leave the employee will return to his/her former post or a post with the same terms and conditions and status. The employee will not be disadvantaged by taking Parental Leave and in the event of a redeployment/redundancy situation he/she will be treated as if they were working normally.
- ix. In the event that an employee leaves the Trust and then takes up appointment at a later date, he/she will have to re-qualify if the continuous service is broken.
- x. New employees will be asked for details of the Parental Leave taken with a previous employer and this will be verified by the previous employer before commencement of employment to ensure the appropriate entitlement is given.



5 Application for Parental Leave

- i. Applications for Parental Leave should be made on the appropriate Leave Form, available from the Line Manager or the Human Resources Department, Ambulance Headquarters, Site 30 Knockbracken Healthcare Park, Saintfield Road, Belfast, BT8 8SG. Telephone: 028 90 400 999. This form should be completed by the employee and submitted to the Manager for approval and forwarding to the Human Resources Department.
- ii. The employee must give the employer at least 4 weeks' notice of taking leave. If the employee is taking more than 2 weeks leave at any one time the notice must be twice the length of the leave, i.e.,
 - 4 weeks notice for one/two weeks leave
 - 6 weeks notice for three weeks leave
 - 8 weeks notice for four weeks leave

In unforeseen circumstances notice periods may be relaxed up to a maximum of 26 weeks if the entire 18 weeks is to be taken at once.
- iii. The Manager must notify the employee in writing of the outcome of the request. The employer can postpone the leave where the needs of the Service prevail however this cannot be postponed beyond 6 months.
- iv. An employee has the right to appeal the decision of the Manager in relation to a proposed postponement of leave by invoking the Trust's Grievance Procedure.

6 Review of the Scheme

This scheme will be reviewed regularly and monitoring will be undertaken by the Human Resources Department.