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A recent UK study and report conducted by a executive search agency and employment law firm in April 2007 has revealed that despite 39 weeks statutory maternity pay, additional maternity leave benefits and expanded worker's rights to apply for flexible working arrangements (recently introduced under the UK's Work and Families Act) organisations continue to struggle to retain top female talent; employers need to do more than just comply with regulatory requirements to entice women on maternity leave back to work.

These findings send an important message to organisations that to simply offer paid parental leave will not be enough to secure mums and dads to return to work following parental leave; a real concern for businesses already suffering from general labour shortages.

#### **What must organisations do to attract parents back to work and keep them?**

The 2007 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Community (HREOC) report on work life balance suggests that 'flexibility in the workplace' is the fundamental component to enable workers to meet the ever increasing demands of work and family life.

**Where should employers focus their efforts to best support the needs of their employees without compromising business productivity?** Rather than guess, mums@work encourages employers to go direct to the source and ask their working mums and dads just what assistance is most beneficial before embarking on implementing flexible work and parental leave policies.

Mums@work Director, Emma Walsh states that company's can fail to implement feasible flexible work solutions and risk losing its parental workforce unless they more deeply understand the common issues working parents actually face not only when they return to their job but on an ongoing basis as juggle the demands of work and raising a family.

For organisations to understand the needs of its working parents, employers must be prepared to openly discuss and negotiate practical return to work options that can be accommodated and are realistic for both parties. This is not always easy given we live and work in an ever changing environment; what might be agreeable today, won't be suitable tomorrow.

Organisations are constantly evolving to adapt to the diversifying needs of their consumers and clients. Employers need to recognise its employees as *clients* and work together to continually find agreeable working solutions otherwise risk losing valuable, hard to replace talent.

Why Women decide not to  
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## Why Women decide not to return to work

As parents struggle to meet the rising costs of child care, hold down to two jobs (the one at work and at home) organisations need to be prepared not only to offer paid incentives to return to work but also proactively assist employees develop a practical return to work plan that considers all the available options.

### **Case study: Allen & Overy**

UK Law firm Allen & Overy introduced maternity leave coaching just over a year ago on a three-part basis: prior to going on leave, during leave, and before coming back. According to HR officer Jane Masey, the boost to women's self-confidence has been obvious. All coaches are women and senior staff are eligible for three one- or two hour one-on-one sessions. The firm also offers emergency childcare via a crèche close to the office, emergency leave, childcare vouchers, parenting seminars for both sexes and in-house diversity events that Masey says "help keep the issue of diversity front of mind".

**Source Durler Consulting.**

For more information on this topic, please contact Emma Walsh, Director, mums@work on 02 9967 8377 or see our website [www.mumsatwork.com.au](http://www.mumsatwork.com.au)