

Learning and Teaching Support Handbook

Chapter 25 - Student Pregnancy, Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The University of Exeter is committed to ensuring that students who are pregnant or who have caring responsibility for very young children¹ as a result of their pregnancy and/or maternity. This duty is compliant with the Equality Act 2010, under which pregnancy and maternity is treated as a protected characteristic.
- 1.2 In addition to legal compliance the University recognises the need to provide support during pregnancy, and also maternity and paternity leave, as part of our commitment to equality and diversity, and to ensure students have the best chance of continuing their studies and realising their academic potential.
- 1.3 The University also recognises the need to provide similar advice and support to students who become parents through the process of adoption. This policy is intended to apply equally to circumstances of adoption as for the birth of a child.
- 1.4 The University acknowledges that individual students will have different needs and requirements, and it is not possible to provide detailed information to cover all circumstances and situations. This Policy is intended to be used as a framework, offering general guidance to facilitate individualised planning around the specific needs of each student. Where necessary and appropriate, the Policy will refer to other sources of information and advice.
- 1.5 This policy is intended to act in concert with and complementary to existing University procedures, such as for Interruption (see the TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 13 for taught; see the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 5 for postgraduate research).
- 1.6 It is recognised that a student's personal circumstances may mean that this policy may apply on more than one occasion during his or her studies.

2. Scope

- 2.1 The Policy should be used in the following circumstances:
 - a. Any student (undergraduate, postgraduate taught or postgraduate research) who becomes pregnant during study.
 - b. Any applicant who will be pregnant when commencing studies.

- c. Any student who has given birth within the last 26 weeks.
- d. Any student whose partner is pregnant, where the student will assume caring responsibility for the child. This provision should also apply for same-sex partners.
- e. Any student who becomes a parent through the process of adoption.

3. Principles

3.1 The following principles underpin this Policy:

3.1.1 Pregnancy and maternity should not in themselves provide a barrier for students starting, continuing or successfully completing their studies.

3.1.2 Students should be provided with support and advice to enable them to make their own informed decisions and to make arrangements for their pregnancy and maternity, through a detailed Pregnancy & Maternity Support and Adjustments Plan (Annex A).

3.1.3 While students are not obliged to disclose pregnancy to the University, in the absence of timely disclosure the University may not be able to provide necessary advice and support to the student to assist in their planning, and the student may be exposed to risks in respect of health and safety.

3.1.4 Staff should recognise and respect the student's right to confidentiality and should only share information with others where there is a clear reason for doing so, and with the student's knowledge and consent.

3.1.5 Whilst the intention of this Policy is to enable students to make arrangements for pregnancy and maternity related absence, and to consider adjustments in respect of normal arrangements for study and assessment, it is recognised that there may be exceptional circumstances where it may not be possible to accommodate students' wishes. Where this is so, the Pro-Vice Chancellor and Executive Dean of Faculty (or nominee) must approve the decision, and the student must be provided with a written explanation.

4. Responsibilities of the Student

4.1 A student who believes they may be pregnant or has confirmed a pregnancy is strongly advised to make contact with their GP, to arrange for appropriate medical advice and ante-natal care, including advice about the impact on study as the pregnancy progresses.

- 4.2 Whilst there is no absolute requirement to disclose a pregnancy to the University, students are strongly advised to do so in order to facilitate the support and planning process, to enable them to manage the pregnancy and maternity alongside their studies, and to ensure consideration is given to matters of health and safety. The exception to the right to non-disclosure applies to programmes of study where students may be exposed to hazardous materials, in which case there is a legal requirement upon the student to disclose.
- 4.3 Students should take responsibility for reading and understanding this Policy, in order to make an informed decision about whether to disclose, and should be clear about the consequences of choosing not to disclose.
- 4.4 Students should disclose in the first instance to an appropriate member of staff in their Faculty; for example their Pastoral Mentor (also known as Personal Tutor), Senior Tutor, Supervisor, PGR Pastoral Tutor, or a member of Professional Services staff with responsibility for pastoral support and welfare.
- 4.5 In the event that a student remains uncertain about whether to disclose, or is not sure who to disclose to, they may seek impartial advice from the Students' Guild (Exeter campuses) or the Students' Union (Cornwall campuses).
- 4.6 Students should take responsibility for understanding the specific requirements of their programme of study, and the possible impact of any pregnancy or maternity related absence on arrangements for study and assessment.
- 4.7 Following disclosure students should participate fully in the process of developing and reviewing a personalised Pregnancy & Maternity Support and Adjustments Plan (see Annex A), in conjunction with an appropriate member of staff from their academic Faculty and a member of staff from Professional Services with responsibility for pastoral support and welfare.
- 4.8 Applicants who are pregnant or who will have a very young child at the time of enrolment are advised to notify the Head of Admissions of their circumstances, so that arrangements can be made for consultation with the student in respect of support and adjustments. This consideration will be made entirely separately from the decision on the application for admission.
- 4.9 Where a pregnancy/maternity related absence is planned, the student should notify the University no later than 15 weeks before the expected due date, providing evidence such

as the NHS Mat1B form which can be obtained from a GP when the pregnancy has been confirmed.

- 4.10 Students should note that they will not be permitted to return to their studies for a period of at least two weeks following the birth of the baby, in line with staff maternity leave policy for required Health and Safety reasons. Where possible, the intended date for return to study should be discussed and agreed as part of the Pregnancy & Maternity Support and Adjustments Plan (Annex A). Students should contact the University no later than 10 days before their date of return, and sooner, if possible, to confirm arrangements for return.
- 4.11 International students should seek advice from the International Student Support Office regarding the implications of any pregnancy-related absence on their visa, which will be considered within the Pregnancy and Maternity Support and Adjustments Plan. **It is imperative that International students seek early advice as any interruption of studies could have serious consequences in relation to visa permissions and study status.**
- 4.12 Students should seek advice about potential implications for their funding of any maternity related absence. The Students' Guild (Exeter campuses) and the Students' Union (Cornwall campuses) will provide impartial and independent advice about financial matters. In the case of postgraduate students, arrangements for pregnancy and maternity-related absence will differ depending on the nature of the funding arrangements, and further information is set out in the TQA LTS Handbook Chapter 25 Annex C - Maternity leave, paternity/maternity support leave and adoption leave - Policy for funded postgraduate research students. **It is imperative that all students seek early advice as any interruption of studies could have serious consequences in relation to impact on funding arrangements during or following maternity leave.**
- 4.13 Students will be responsible for the safety and supervision of their baby on the occasions they bring them onto campus, and should identify any areas of campus that they may normally have access to which would not be considered a safe environment for babies – for example, workshops and laboratories. Any applicable statutory requirements as per the Children, Young Persons and Vulnerable Adults Standard must be met, further information can be found on the University's Health and Safety Hub. Otherwise, consideration will be given to the options for flexibility and adjustment as part of the Pregnancy & Maternity Support and Adjustments Plan (Annex A).

5. Responsibilities of University Staff

- 5.1 Staff who are involved in advising and supporting students to make informed decisions about their pregnancy and maternity should do so in an open-minded and non-judgemental way and should at all times avoid treating the student less favourably as a result of their pregnancy and maternity.
- 5.2 Staff should familiarise themselves with the detail of this Policy and should seek specialist advice on any areas which require it. Further information and contacts are outlined in Annex B: Further Information.
- 5.3 Staff who are advising students on the impact of the pregnancy and maternity should familiarise themselves with the requirements for the student's programme of study, in order to assist them in considering support and adjustments.
- 5.4 Staff are not expected to be experts in all matters relating to pregnancy or maternity, and it is anticipated that there will be limitations to the advice that they will be able to offer. In this respect staff should be clear with students about limitations of their knowledge and experience, and should seek further advice as appropriate from other individuals and services, as outlined in Annex B: Further Information.
- 5.5 Staff who are responsible for undertaking the Pregnancy & Maternity Support and Adjustments Plan (Annex A) with the student should ensure that arrangements for review are clearly stated within the Plan.
- 5.6 The Plan should be approved and signed off by the Faculty Pro-Vice Chancellor and Executive Dean or Dean of School (or nominee).
- 5.7 Due respect for confidentiality should be observed at all times, and staff should be mindful that information on pregnancy and maternity is personal and sensitive, and should only be shared with others on a need to know basis, with the knowledge and consent of the student.

6. Pregnancy and Maternity Support and Adjustments Plan

- 6.1 Where a student has disclosed a pregnancy to a member of staff, that member of staff can seek advice from the Head of Education Support or nominee to identify appropriate staff to support the student in developing a Pregnancy & Maternity Support and Adjustments Plan (Annex A).

- 6.2 The student should be supported in developing the Plan by a member of staff from his or her Faculty who has sufficient understanding of the academic structure of the student's programme of study to consider the impact of pregnancy and maternity on arrangements for study and assessment, and to suggest flexibility and adjustments. Developing the Plan should also involve a member of staff with appropriate experience in welfare and pastoral support, in order to advise on wider support related issues.
- 6.3 The initial Plan (including a Maternity Risk Assessment) should be completed as soon as possible after the notification of the student's pregnancy. The student and staff completing the initial Plan should agree the arrangements for review, taking account of key dates within the cycle of pregnancy and maternity (16 weeks, 24 weeks, and in advance of return to study). The arrangements for review should also take account of key points in the academic year – e.g. exams, placements, field trips, etc. The Plan should also be reviewed if there is a change to the student's circumstances, or to the programme of study.
- 6.4 The Plan should consider scope for flexibility around arrangements for study and assessment, including the following:
- 6.4.1 Absence for medical appointments
 - 6.4.2 Flexibility regarding deadlines where necessary
 - 6.4.3 Special arrangements for exams – for example, allowing extra time, availability of food and drink, etc.
- 6.5 Consideration may be given to allowing the student to interrupt studies for a period of time, or to switch to part time attendance. Arrangements for interruption and changes to mode of attendance are outlined in the following chapters, depending on the category of student:
- 6.5.1 Postgraduate Research Students: the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 5: Statement of Procedures: Periods of Registration and Changes to Registration Status for Graduate Research Students.
 - 6.5.2 Taught Students: Chapter 13, Procedures for the interruption and voluntary withdrawal of taught students.
- 6.6 In case of interruption or change to mode of attendance, specialist advice should be obtained on the potential impact of funding arrangements, and on visa arrangements for international students.

- 6.7 A Template for the Pregnancy & Maternity Support and Adjustments Plan can be found in Annex A.

7. Keeping in Touch (KIT) days (PGR only)

- 7.1 Keeping in Touch (KIT) days are intended to help students on maternity or adoption leave with the process of resuming study and to enable supervisors to maintain better contact and encourage more open communication with people on maternity or adoption leave. By maintaining a minimal, but regular, presence during maternity/adoption leave - bearing in mind there is no obligation for the student to do so - Keeping in Touch days can offer real benefit to the student.
- 7.2 These days are optional and the decision to undertake a KIT day must be made by agreement between the student and their supervisor (there are no rights for either the student or the University to require such days).
- 7.3 There can be up to 10 days taken during the period of maternity/adoption leave.
- 7.4 All students attending KIT days must have completed the Pregnancy and Maternity Support & Adjustments Plan (TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 25, Annex A) and the New and Expectant Mothers at Work Risk Assessment form (TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 25, Annex D) and have the work itself approved before a student may attend.
- 7.5 PGRs intending to work in the lab during a KIT day should refer to the Laboratory Safety Standards found on the University's Health and Safety Hub.
- 7.6 PGRs intending to complete field work or other off-campus visits should consider the Staff and PGR/PhD Travel Policy & Advice, details of which can be accessed via the University's Travel SharePoint site.
- 7.7 PGRs are required to plan their KIT days in advance of taking them and have completed and submitted all relevant risk assessments to the supervisor and PGR Support Team no less than one week before the planned KIT Day. KIT days cannot be retrospectively claimed.
- 7.8 The type of work may be anything that you would normally do to contribute to your research/study, and could include attendance at supervisory or research group meetings, research seminars, on-campus private study (e.g. desk or library-based research), lab work, attendance at conferences etc. Off campus working, including fieldwork and site-visits may be considered, provided the student completes the relevant risk assessments (see section 4 of this policy, above).

- 7.9 Students in receipt of funding will not be paid for attending KIT days, nor will it be possible for the University to meet any additional childcare costs. However, for each KIT day, the period of interruption will be extended by one day. For example, if a student were due to return to study on 02 April and worked 5 KIT days, their stipend payments would still restart on 02 April, but their period of interruption would be extended by 5 days. The student would return from interruption on 07 April. If, however, KIT days occur during the period when a student is receiving Maternity Pay or Adoption Pay, these payments will not be affected.
- 7.10 Any research/study carried out on any KIT day will count as one full day.
- 7.11 For health and safety reasons, a student **must not** return to their research during the first two weeks after giving birth to a baby, and therefore it is not possible for a student to take any KIT days during this period.

8. Arrangements for Partners (including same sex partners)

- 8.1 Any student who is the partner of a pregnant person, or who has or is likely to have caring responsibilities for a very young child (including same sex partners), will be entitled to ask for flexibility in respect of arrangements for study and assessment.
- 8.2 Students in such circumstances are encouraged to discuss their situation with their Pastoral Mentor (also known as Personal Tutor), Senior Tutor, Supervisor, PGR Pastoral Tutor, or a member of Professional Services staff with responsibility for pastoral support and welfare. If a student is unsure who to disclose this information to, they should seek advice from the Students' Guild (Exeter campuses) or the Students' Union (Cornwall campuses).
- 8.3 Flexible arrangements may include permissible absence for medical appointments prior to and after the birth, a period of absence at the time of the birth (paternity leave), consideration of the circumstances of the student in respect of any deadlines, assessment and exams, or interruption to studies, depending on personal circumstances.
- 8.4 Partners are entitled to an extended period of unpaid parental leave, up to a maximum of 50 weeks, with their period of study (and any studentships paid through the University) extended accordingly. Unpaid parental leave must be completed within 12 months of the birth of the child. This leave may be taken in up to three blocks of leave or all at once, depending on your programme of study. Students should discuss their

circumstances with their Pastoral Mentor (also known as Personal Tutor) (taught) or Pastoral Tutors (PGR), or their Info Point/PGR Support Team.

- 8.5 Students in receipt of research funding should check the terms of the funding with their Research Council, other funding organisation or sponsor, as in some instances they may be entitled to paid paternity leave.
- 8.6 International students who are considering absence as a result of their partner's pregnancy and maternity should seek advice from the International Student Support Office in respect of any implications to their visa as a result of interruption or a change in the expected completion date for their studies. **It is imperative that International students seek early advice as any interruption of studies could have serious consequences in relation to visa permissions and study status.**
- 8.7 The University has established co-parental leave for funded PGR students, subject to strict eligibility criteria. This aims to offer a variation on shared parental leave, within the parameters of what the University can offer. Further information is available in the TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 25, annexes E1 and E2.

9. Arrangements for Adoption

- 9.1 Students who are planning to or who have become parents as a result of adoption are entitled to the same support and advice as other students who become parents during their studies, and the principles and processes outlined in this Policy should apply.
- 9.2 It is acknowledged that the timeframe for adoption arrangements may not allow as much time for planning in comparison with a pregnant student, and where this is the case, the student and the member of staff will follow the principles and processes as far as they are able.
- 9.3 Where two students are jointly adopting, only one member of the couple will be considered as the primary caregiver, who will be entitled to be considered for maternity related absence etc. The other partner will be afforded the same entitlements as is outlined for partners in Section 7 above.

10. Difficulties in Pregnancy; Termination, Miscarriage and Stillbirth

- 10.1 Students who are uncertain whether to continue with a pregnancy should be signposted to support and advice to help them reach a decision, with contact details outlined in Annex B: Further Information.

- 10.2 If the student decides to terminate a pregnancy, the student may need time off for medical tests before and to recover after the procedure. Consideration should also be given to the emotional and psychological impact of termination, and the student should be reminded of the availability of support services. The impact of termination on physical and psychological wellbeing may require flexibility to be applied in respect of deadlines and exams, and staff should be mindful of the need to adopt a sensitive and confidential approach.
- 10.3 Students who experience miscarriage may require support and flexibility to allow them to recover from the physical and psychological impact, and to attend medical appointments.
- 10.4 Stillbirth is defined as the death of the baby in the womb, or at the time of the birth, after 24 weeks of pregnancy. A student who experiences a stillbirth or death of a baby shortly after birth should be entitled to the same support and entitlements as a student whose baby is not stillborn.

¹ Defined for this purpose as under 26 weeks and/or breastfeeding.