

# Policy Statement and Supplementary Guidance for Student Pregnancy, Maternity, Paternity, Adoption and Student Parents



*This policy and guidance was originally approved by ULTSEC 28<sup>th</sup> May 2014.*

*This policy was revised and approved by UEC on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2021 and previously on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2018 and 1<sup>st</sup> June 2016.*

## **Introduction**

The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on the University to promote equality for the following protected characteristics: pregnancy and maternity; age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation.

This document provides advice and guidance to:

- Students who are pregnant at any stage during their studies, to their partners, and to those who have recently become parents (e.g. through adoption) on issues related to study, health and safety, and finance.
- University staff who may have a role in advising students coming to them with these issues.

## **Scope of the Policy and Guidance**

The Policy and Guidance covers any student who becomes pregnant during their studies, and students who are about to become parents. This includes any student who is the partner (including same sex partner) of someone who is pregnant and expects to be responsible for the child, and any student becoming a parent (e.g. through adoption) of a child.

The principles of this Policy Statement and supplementary guidance apply to all students regardless of the location of study, including those students studying at approved campuses. Any local arrangements at approved campuses should follow the principles of this policy as closely as possible, taking into account the local context.

On a case by case basis some staff roles may vary from those detailed below.

## **Policy Statement**

Newcastle University is committed to promoting equality in all its activities and aims to provide a work, learning, research and teaching environment free from discrimination and unfair treatment. The University actively seeks to develop best practice in discharging its legal responsibility.

The University believes that becoming pregnant or caring for a child should not, in itself, prevent any student from succeeding in their studies. **The University is committed to showing as much flexibility as possible to facilitate students' success, making sure no student is disadvantaged whilst ensuring academic standards are not compromised.** The degree of flexibility that can be offered will vary between disciplines, but all academic units will follow the general approach set out in this document.

**The health and safety of a pregnant student will be of paramount importance at all times, and academic units will deal with all students covered by this policy in a sensitive, non-judgemental and confidential manner.** Only members of staff who need to be informed for valid reasons will be informed of a student's circumstances and this will normally be done with the student's prior consent.

Appendix A provides additional information for postgraduate research students. While this policy focuses primarily on study-related matters, sources of help and advice on related issues can be found In ***Student Pregnancy, Maternity, Paternity, Adoption and Student Parents - Policy Statement and supplementary guidance (May 2018)***

## **Supplementary Guidance**

### **1. Rights and Responsibilities - students who are pregnant during their studies**

#### **1.1 Confirming the Pregnancy**

A student who suspects they are pregnant should see their GP to have the pregnancy confirmed as soon as possible. If they decide to terminate the pregnancy, or miscarry, this need not be disclosed to the University. Absence from the University required as a result should be classed as 'sickness absence'. If the student requires a medical certificate to cover the absence any medical evidence will be handled in strict confidence by the University.

Students may approach the Student Health and Wellbeing Service if they need personal support in adjusting to their change in circumstances. Additionally the Students' Union Student Advice Centre can provide support in outlining pregnancy options and financial support.

If a student plans to continue with their pregnancy and feels that they may need some adjustments to their studies the student should inform their academic unit as soon as possible. The University can only make provision for the student once it is aware of the pregnancy. Whilst the Tutor or Supervisor would normally be the first point of contact, the student can initially choose to speak to another member of staff with whom they feel most comfortable. However, students should note that the Tutor or Supervisor will normally need to be informed in due course. The student must be advised of the key contact if this is other than the Tutor or main Supervisor.

A student is not under any obligation to inform the University, however, it is not possible to provide support or adjustments to a student if the University is unaware of the situation.

#### **1.2 Implications for Study – leave of absence**

The key contact from the academic unit will meet with the student to discuss how the pregnancy is likely to impact on study. (A checklist is provided in Appendix C to aid this discussion.) Where there are particular implications for study or any special arrangements, a written summary should be made of the requirements. The student should receive a copy of this, as should other appropriate member(s) of staff requiring this information. The student's permission should be established before passing on information.

There **may** need to be a leave of absence depending on when the baby is due, and the student together with the Tutor, Supervisor or key contact will decide (1) whether an interruption is needed and (2) if so, the duration of the interruption. This decision also needs to take into account the academic requirements of the student's programme. A student with a baby due near the examination period might require confirmation from their GP that they are fit to sit exams. Time off might also be needed for medical appointments. Adjustments are normally arranged in line with normal procedures – see below.

Subject to arrangements for the programme, especially taught programmes with structured semester dates, by right students are entitled to a period of up to 52 weeks Maternity Leave. The student is expected to notify their academic unit of the pregnancy no later than 15 weeks before the baby is due if they intend to take Maternity Leave.

Research students should provide a copy of the medical certificate MATB1, issued by their midwife, confirming the date the baby is due. The earliest that a research student can plan to take maternity leave is 11 weeks before the baby is due. However the maternity leave automatically begins if the student is unable to continue with study due to a pregnancy related illness within the 4-week period before the baby is due or if the baby arrives prior to the planned start of the Maternity Leave.

It is a legal requirement that students should not return to study within 2 weeks of giving birth for health

***Student Pregnancy, Maternity, Paternity, Adoption and Student Parents - Policy Statement and supplementary guidance (May 2018)***

and safety reasons (4 weeks if there is placement in a factory). If students wish to return to their studies before the planned return date previously agreed they should contact their Tutor or Supervisor or key contact as soon as possible and at least 2 weeks before the new return date. It may be appropriate for the student and Tutor, Supervisor or key contact to plan an appropriate timetable for re-integration into the programme of study, including the examination schedule, where appropriate.

The period of maternity leave cannot be broken by other types of absences. If students become ill during the maternity period, the absence is treated as part of the maternity leave up to the end of that maternity leave period.

The academic unit must ensure that on return to study, the student is correctly registered.

### **1.3 Implications for Study – health and safety**

There may be **health and safety** measures needing to be put in place in order to protect the student and their unborn baby, and this will be particularly relevant in certain disciplines (e.g. where the student might be exposed to harmful chemicals or radiation, or be expected to lift heavy objects or undertake fieldwork or other strenuous activity). Therefore, once the student has informed the academic unit of the pregnancy, a Risk Assessment will be completed by the academic unit – normally by the relevant local Health and Safety Officer who will consult the Occupational Health and Safety Service (OHSS) if required. This will identify any risks that may be present which could harm the student and/or baby, and detail steps that need to be put in place to alleviate or minimise these risks. It should also detail any risks that may arise from any placement period or fieldwork due to be undertaken. The risk assessment should be reviewed at agreed periods during the pregnancy and may include the return to study period if the student is breastfeeding.

Any student who has given birth must not return to University within two weeks of giving birth as indicated in 1.2 above.

The risk assessment may include a requirement for the student to consult a health care provider (e.g. GP, midwife). Occupational Health advice is also available for research students.

### **1.4 Implications for Study – programme activities**

If the student continues to study during the pregnancy, regular meetings should be held with the Tutor or Supervisor or other key contact, to assess the effectiveness of any special arrangements put in place. Where necessary, further adjustments can be considered.

Where the student plans to take part in **field work**, pregnancy should be risk assessed by the academic unit responsible for organising the field work. There may be particular risks associated with the field work and the student should discuss this fully with the appropriate member of staff. Students will not normally be permitted to take part in field work after the 7th month of pregnancy.

Where the student plans to take part in a **study year abroad or a placements**, pregnancy should be risk assessed by the academic unit responsible for organising the placement. If the student becomes pregnant whilst on a study year abroad or a placement, the student is encouraged to inform the academic unit to ensure that appropriate plans are in place to safeguard the student's health and properly manage academic progress. If the host organisation cannot offer adequate support for the student the academic unit may need to discuss termination of the placement with the student.

University insurance, if it applies in the context of a student working and studying overseas as part of their course, does not cover foreseen situations such as a planned birth and related health care. It may be therefore appropriate for the student or the key contact to seek advice on the [University's insurance terms](#). Students may need to purchase additional private health care insurance for any overseas work or study.

## **1.5 Other implications - funding**

The University provides advice to students on funding sources and may be able to advise on implications for some funding on becoming a parent. Please refer to Student Services - Financial Support Team. Advice may also be obtained from the Student Advice Centre.

The benefit rules are different for EU students and international students, and further advice should be sought from the Student Advice Centre or the Department for Work and Pensions. The support opportunities from finance providers, such as Student Finance England (SFE) should also be reviewed.

In the event of a leave of absence being agreed, undergraduate students should note that funding will usually stop when the leave of absence begins, normally the student may however apply for discretionary funding from SFE or equivalent organisation. The University will automatically inform the Student Loan Company and relevant national UK fee providers. Normally there is no tuition fee due to the University during a leave of absence.

The University refund policy covers refunds of tuition fees for self-funded or privately sponsored students who take a leave of absence. Students should contact Student Services - Tuition Fees Team for further information.

Where a University studentship has been awarded to a student this is normally suspended during any leave of absence but will normally remain available upon the student's return to study.

The University has limited hardship funding that may be available for students. Please refer to Student Services - the Student Health and Wellbeing Service.

## **1.6 Other implications – international student visas to study in the UK**

International students with financial sponsors must contact their sponsors and agree a plan of action (such as deferring study/ when to resume study etc.). Those international students who are not entitled to any maternity benefits in the UK may prefer to return home for the duration of their pregnancy. It should be remembered that airlines may not carry passengers who are 7 months pregnant or more, and this should be taken into account when planning. (Please consult airline policies).

Where an international student requires a leave of absence for more than one month (including any sequential periods of absence) the University is obliged to report the absence to the Home Office. Depending on the circumstances, leave to remain in the UK may be curtailed. Students should consult Student Services - Visa Team on specific implications for their visa.

## **1.7 Other implications - accommodation**

Pregnant students living in University accommodation may find that this is no longer suitable, for health and safety reasons. In addition, their tenancy agreement may be for single occupancy only. The due date and student plans may influence accommodation options. Pregnant students are encouraged to discuss their circumstances with Student Services - Accommodation Team as soon as possible. If required, support will be offered in finding suitable accommodation options for the student's individual circumstances. The University has a small number of flats suitable for family accommodation, although there is generally a waiting list for these. For more information, students should contact Student Services –Accommodation Team - who can also provide advice to students about finding non-University owned family accommodation.

## **2. Rights and Responsibilities – Student Parents**

### **2.1 Support for partners who have responsibility for bringing up the child**

Any student discovering they are about to become a parent or who expect to be responsible for raising a child, will be entitled to request time out of study. This is likely to include time off for medical appointments prior to, and after, the birth, as well as a period of maternity support leave immediately following the birth. A student in this situation should contact their Tutor or Supervisor to discuss this. Flexibility will be shown where possible although this will necessarily be more limited in some programmes/disciplines than others. It should be noted that the Tutor or Supervisor will need to be informed, even if discussions involve a different staff member.

Up to two weeks paternity leave may be taken at any time during a partner's pregnancy or within three months following the birth. This will be additional to the normal annual leave entitlement. For research students there will normally be no change to the student's funding end date or submission deadline.

Adjustments are normally arranged in line with normal procedures – see below.

## **2.2 Students about to become parents (e.g. through adoption)**

Students about to become parents (e.g. through adoption or because their partner is about to give birth) should inform their Tutor or Supervisor to discuss their circumstances as soon as possible. It should be noted that the Tutor or Supervisor will need to be informed, even if discussions involve a different staff member. Flexibility will be shown where possible although this will necessarily be more limited in some programmes/disciplines than others.

The main carer of an adopted child is entitled to a period of up to 52 weeks Adoption Leave. Aspects of maternity leave (see section 1 above) apply - i.e. funding, the need for planning the leave of absence and a reintegration to study.

Arrangements can also be made to allow time out of study for the parent who is not the main carer. Maternity Support / Adoption Leave (other than for the main carer) is normally for a maximum of 10 days. Within this limit, the period of time off may vary depending on the age of the child, the programme of study being undertaken, and the point in the academic session at which the event takes place. Leave can be taken during a partner's pregnancy or within three months following the birth/adoption. This leave is in effect additional annual leave. For research students there will be no change to the student's funding end date or submission deadline. Adjustments are normally arranged in line with normal procedures – see below.

## **2.3 Postgraduate Research students**

Postgraduate Research students receiving funding from external bodies should follow the guidance for their particular scheme, or contact their funding body or sponsor for further advice.

Employer, Visa or Funder terms and conditions overrule University Policy. By accepting a Studentship or Visa, the student is agreeing to the specific terms and conditions of the funder, employer or Home Office, which may differ from the entitlements noted above.

UKRI (UK Research and Innovation) and certain other funders provide paid maternity leave only if the student is in receipt of a full studentship. However, other funders may only support unpaid leave (e.g. University Scholarships). Postgraduate Research students funded by UKRI may have additional entitlements to maternity support leave or paid paternity / adoption leave. Further guidance is provided in Appendix A.

## **3. Babies/Children on Campus**

Students may be accompanied by children in general public areas such as the Courtyard, or in one-to-one tutorials if the tutor permits. Children brought onto the campus are the responsibility of the adult who brings them and must be supervised at all times. From a Health and Safety perspective, the

University environment is not, in general, designed for, nor does it take specific account of, the needs of young children and toddlers; therefore close and continuous supervision by the parent / carer will be required at all times. Under no circumstances should children be brought into areas where there is the possibility of a risk to health and safety (notable examples would include laboratories and workshops) unless specific approval has been given by an authorised member of the relevant academic unit. The University cannot be held responsible for what might happen to an unattended child on University property.

Students should not normally bring their child with them into any public teaching and research areas – such as lecture theatres, seminar or teaching rooms, laboratories or shared work spaces – and so they will need to make arrangements for the care of their child whilst they are in these locations. Student parents must ensure they have suitable childcare arrangements in place at times when they are expected to be at University.

Children are welcome in the Library for short visits when accompanying parents/guardians (for example if the return of books or the collection of reserved items). Children should be accompanied at all times when in the Library

The University provides baby change facilities on the Newcastle campus in the following locations:

- Student Services, level 2, King's Gate
- Newcastle University Students' Union – basement and level 2.
- The Robinson Library.

Additional baby change facilities will be developed as buildings are refurbished. For an updated list see [here](#).

Nursing mothers should be aware that there are no specific facilities for expressing milk on campus and that alternative arrangements should be made. Students can approach their academic unit to enquire about booking a suitable room for expressing milk and access to a refrigerator to store expressed milk. The academic unit should undertake a risk assessment and the University's assumption is that the academic unit will provide reasonable access to private space and a refrigerator for this purpose unless there is good reason to the contrary.

#### **4. Complaints**

Any student who feels that the University has failed to meet the standards identified in this policy and guidance may raise a complaint under the [University's Student Complaints and Resolution Procedure](#). It is suggested that problems are resolved as informally as possible in the first instance. The Student Advice Centre can provide impartial, confidential advice to students in this situation (contact details at the end of this document).

#### **5. Guidance for Staff**

This section provides guidance on the support of students coming under the scope of this policy, for use by any member of staff with a role in advising or supporting students. At all times, staff must ensure those students are not treated less favourably than any other student on the basis of their circumstances. In line with the University's legal obligations, flexibility should be shown where possible to ensure continued learning is facilitated. Information given by students should be treated confidentially and with sensitivity. Staff should not attempt to influence any student's decision but should provide impartial advice.

When a student contacts a member of staff to discuss any circumstances covered by this policy, a response should be made within five working days and a meeting arranged as soon as possible thereafter. If the member of staff being contacted by the student is not the student's Tutor or Supervisor, the Tutor or Supervisor should nonetheless be kept informed subject to permission from the student.

## 5.1 Adjustments

Whilst it is recognised that each request must be dealt with on an individual basis, there are a number of measures that can be used in order to enable the student's continuation of study. These include:

- Allowing a leave of absence from study (for a pre-determined amount of time) for the birth, or adoption, and a period of time thereafter.
- Prior to and after the birth, or adoption, giving permission for periods of absence for medical appointments, and making arrangements for the student to catch up on missed classes.
- Showing a degree of flexibility regarding assignment deadlines if the student's circumstances make it difficult for them to be met.
- Allowing resit examinations to be counted as first attempts where the pregnancy or birth or adoption prevents the student from taking them at the usual first attempt.
- Consideration of any requests to transfer to part-time study, where this is possible (although the student should bear in mind the implications of this course of action). Staff should refer the student for advice if appropriate.
- Offering support to help the student reintegrate to their studies after any period of prolonged absence.
- Exam adjustments such as being able to sit near the exit/rest breaks etc.

### **Adjustments should be administered via normal University procedures:**

Key procedures include:

- Personal Extenuating Circumstances,
- Student Notice of Absence procedure,
- Change of Circumstance procedures – taught programmes,
- Change of Circumstance procedures – research programmes.

It is important to take the views and wishes of the student into account, rather than applying a standard set of arrangements. All decisions taken should be based on discussion with or input from the student.

Whilst an appropriate degree of flexibility should be exercised, care must be taken to ensure that academic standards are not compromised. A balance must be achieved between ensuring the student is not disadvantaged, and giving undue special treatment. It is not necessary for the University to grant every request made, although efforts should be made to meet reasonable requests. Requests should not be refused solely on the basis of being too costly to implement, although this will necessarily be considered when assessing the overall 'reasonableness' of a request. If any request is refused, the reasons for the refusal should be provided in writing for the student.

Where specific arrangements are required to be put in place for a student who is already granted additional arrangements (e.g. on the grounds of disability), these should be kept separate in order that it remains clear which arrangements relate to which particular circumstance. This ensures that these arrangements are in place for the required amount of time and also clarifies adherence to the different pieces of legislation.

For staff requiring more detailed guidance on specific requests for adjustments to the programme, advice can be sought on any of the above from the Student Progress Service or relevant Deans.

## Appendix A – Additional Guidance for Postgraduate Research Students

Although the entitlement is 2 weeks, absences of up to 4 weeks for Paternity, Maternity Support or Adoption leave may be approved by the main Supervisor. These absences must be reported to the Academic Unit in line with the unit's absence reporting procedures.

Absences greater than 4 weeks for Maternity or Adoption or Maternity Support or extended paternity leave must be reported to the Research Student Support Team (HASS and SAgE) or Graduate School (FMS). An interruption of studies must be arranged by completing an Interruption application form, which should be accompanied by documentary medical evidence of maternity (for the pregnant student or partner) or evidence of adoption. (Details are available [here](#).)

### Submission Deadlines

For absences of up to 4 weeks for Paternity, Maternity Support or Adoption leave there will be no adjustment to the student's submission deadline as no formal interruption has been approved as this leave is in effect additional annual leave

For absences greater than 4 weeks for Maternity or Maternity Support leave, where a formal interruption of studies is approved, the student's submission deadline will be adjusted in line with the amount of leave taken. If the student is in receipt of funding (e.g., UKRI studentship), the funding end date will also be adjusted in line with the funder's terms and conditions.

### Funding

Not all funders provide financial support to cover maternity/adoption leave, or multiple periods of maternity/adoption leave. UKRI (UK Research and Innovation) and certain other funders provide paid leave where a student is in receipt of a full studentship. However, other funders may only support unpaid leave.

Students in receipt of a studentship/sponsorship from an external funding body should refer to the terms and conditions of their funding for details of periods of leave and funding support they may be entitled to for maternity leave.

Students in receipt of a UKRI studentship awarded through the University receiving a full maintenance stipend, should refer to the additional policy and procedure below, which is an extract from the UKRI Training Grant Terms and Conditions. (The complete terms and conditions are available [here](#).)

- i. UKRI funded student are entitled to 52 weeks of maternity if the expected week of childbirth will occur during the period of their award.
  - The first 26 weeks should be paid at full stipend rate (pro-rated for part-time students).
  - The following 13 weeks should be paid at a level commensurate with statutory maternity pay (approximately 41% of the minimum doctoral stipend).
  - The final 13 weeks are unpaid.
- ii. Adoption leave should be granted on the same basis as maternity leave.
- iii. Any paid and unpaid periods of maternity/adoption leave must be taken consecutively. The studentship will subsequently be extended by a commensurate period.
- iv. Partners funded through a UKRI studentship are entitled to up to two weeks Ordinary Paternity

Leave on full stipend. Ordinary Paternity Leave cannot start before the birth and must end within 56 days of the birth.

- v. Partners are also entitled to a period of unpaid leave, up to a maximum of 50 weeks. 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. The student must apply for an interruption for the period of parental leave.
- vi. There is no qualifying period for maternity, paternity, adoption, or shared parental leave.
- vii. Students must notify their Graduate School if they are not able to return to study by the end of their maternity/adoption/parental leave. Students who do not return to complete their studies following a period of maternity/adoption/parental leave will be required to repay the stipend they have received during their leave.
- viii. If you are an international student in receipt of UKRI funding and your right to remain in the UK is by virtue of a Student Visa, the obligation to permit 12 months leave for maternity/paternity leave and payment is subject to any restrictions on remaining in the UK, and payment of funding imposed by virtue of the legislation and guidance relating to the granting of the Student Visa.

Acknowledgment: Aspects of this policy are developed from an equivalent policy at the University of Glasgow.

## Appendix B - Sources of information and help

### Childcare

[Newcastle City Council Family Information services](#)

### General information and advice

- One Parent Families - [Gingerbread](#)
- [Adoption UK](#)

### Finances

- [Gov.uk – Maternity Information](#)
- [Child Benefit](#)
- [Tax credits](#)
- [Students domiciled in Scotland](#)
- [Students domiciled in Wales](#)
- [Students domiciled in England](#)
- [Students domiciled in Northern Ireland](#)

### Health and Safety

- [Health and Safety advice](#)

### University Services

- [Student Health and Wellbeing Service – Student Parents](#)
- [Accommodation Service](#)
- [Visa Team](#)

[Student Progress Service - Guidance for PGR Students](#)

- [Occupational Health](#) (for PGR students only)
- [Insurance Office](#)

### NUSU Services

- [Student Advice Centre](#)  
Newcastle University Student' Union,  
0191 239 3979  
[Student-Advice-Centre@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:Student-Advice-Centre@ncl.ac.uk)
- [Newcastle University Students' Union](#)  
(Parents and Carers link)

The list of useful contacts is correct at the time of updating – July 2021. Please check the web for up to date contact information.

Please note the Newcastle University does not endorse or take responsibility for the information provided by external organisations.

## **Appendix C – Checklist for Staff when discussing the needs of pregnant students**

The following is an aid to guide discussions with a pregnant student. It is good practice for any special agreements and action points to be documented - the member of staff will normally ensure that an appropriate record is taken and shared with the student and other key parties.

- This University Policy and Guidance.
- Has the student updated contact information on S3P (including emergency contact details)
- Sources of advice within the University - personal support, financial advice, accommodation advice, visa advice.
- Due Date.
- Potential maternity leave period / Leave of absence period.
- Implications for the student's programme - e.g. assessment schedule, placements, field trips, repeat study requirements.
- Do others need to be consulted on these matters?
- During pregnancy, programme activities that require risk assessment (e.g. field trips, lab or practical activities, lone working, travelling).
- Who will complete the risk assessment(s) and who will advise of the requirement(s)?
- Implications (e.g. medical appointments) for attendance and remedial options.
- Implications for assessment or submission deadlines.
- Funding implications and sources of advice.
- Implications for visa.
- Adjustments that the student thinks will be needed to continue to study effectively during the pregnancy.
- Adjustments that the student thinks will be needed upon return to study following the pregnancy.
- University mechanisms for requesting adjustments.
- Permission to discuss the student's case with other named staff.