
Effective from 1 September 2023

This policy is applicable to any registered student who becomes (or is about to become) a parent during their programme of study, whether through their own pregnancy, their partner's pregnancy, an adoption arrangement or surrogacy.

This policy applies to all students, regardless of stage, mode or location of study.

INTRODUCTION

Becoming a parent should not, in itself, prevent you from succeeding in your studies. In order to facilitate your success, the University is committed to showing as much flexibility as possible to students who become – or are about to become - parents during their programme of study.

This policy outlines what you need to do if you become (or are about to become) a parent, and the steps the University will take to accommodate your needs as a new or expectant parent, to enable you to continue on your programme of study.

SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

We understand that welcoming a baby or child into your home can be a stressful and daunting prospect and we want to support you as much as we can. You may find it helpful to consult the following services:

- [The Student Health and Wellbeing Service](#) can provide specific advice to students who are parents. Advice and support is available on a number of topics, including additional financial support, wellbeing support, and how to connect with other student parents.
- The [Student Advice Centre](#) of the Students' Union has a number of resources for student parents.
- [Newcastle City Council](#) provides information to parents and prospective parents on issues such as childcare, children's therapies, money issues and mental health support.
- Information about your rights to paid time off, help with childcare costs, Child Benefit and additional financial support for
- [Adoption UK](#) is a charity providing support to people who are adopted and who are parents to children who are adopted or are in the process of being adopted.
- [Gingerbread](#) is a charity offering support, advice and community to single-parent families.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Throughout this policy, we use non-gendered terms to refer to parents and pregnant people. Please note that these terms are intended to incorporate pregnant women and birthing people of all genders.

Where any reference is made to a 'partner', this includes partners of all genders.

POLICY

If you find out you are going to become a parent, the process you need to follow will depend on how the child has come into your life. Please see the relevant section below:

1. [Your own pregnancy](#)
2. [Adoption](#)
3. [Surrogacy](#)
4. [Your partner's pregnancy](#)

1. Your own pregnancy

If you find out you are (or suspect you may be) pregnant, and you intend to continue with your pregnancy, you should contact your GP surgery to book a midwife "booking appointment". This will ensure that you are receiving the necessary healthcare support throughout your pregnancy.

If you are a University employee and a student has informed you they are pregnant, you may find it helpful to consult the [Checklist for Colleagues when discussing the needs of pregnant students](#).

1.1. Informing the University

You are not obliged to tell the University you are pregnant; however, we would advise you to speak to a University colleague about your pregnancy as soon as practicable. This will enable us to make sure that we are keeping you safe and that you are receiving appropriate support. Usually, students should talk to their Personal Tutor or Supervisory Team in the first instance.

When you inform the University of your pregnancy, your Academic Unit will discuss with you whether you require any adjustments to your programme of study. A written summary of this discussion and any agreed arrangement will be made and this will be shared with you. The University will also ask your permission to share details of these arrangements with appropriate University employees.

Information you give to the University about your pregnancy or related medical issues will be treated as strictly confidential, handled sensitively, and will only be shared with University employees who have a legitimate business need to know. We will normally talk to you in advance of disclosing any of your personal information to let you know who will be informed and why. This is to ensure that you consent to your details being shared.

1.2. Risk assessment

When you inform the University of your pregnancy, your Academic Unit will complete a risk assessment to make sure that we are keeping you and your unborn baby safe. The risk assessment might also involve you speaking to the Occupational Health and Safety Service, or to consult your GP or midwife.

A risk assessment is particularly important if your programme of study involves you handling harmful chemicals or radiation, lifting heavy objects, or undertaking fieldwork. It is important to note that you will not normally be permitted to undertake fieldwork after your 7th month of pregnancy (from 28 weeks onwards).

The risk assessment should highlight any particular areas of concern and what steps may be put in place to minimise any risks to you or your baby. The document will be shared with you and will be reviewed at agreed periods during your pregnancy and when you return to your studies, especially if you are breastfeeding.

If you plan to take part in a study abroad programme or placements, the Academic Unit responsible for organising your placement will undertake a risk assessment. If you discover you are pregnant during your study abroad programme or whilst undertaking a placement, we would encourage you to contact your Academic Unit so we can make sure that the health and safety of both you and your baby are properly safeguarded.

Under UK law, you cannot return to work (including University studies) within two weeks of giving birth (or four weeks if your programme includes a placement in a factory).

1.3. Maternity Leave

You are entitled to take Maternity Leave from your programme of study for up to 52 weeks. This entitlement is in addition to any time off you require to attend antenatal appointments and is the same regardless of whether you are expecting one child or multiple children. You are advised to speak to your Degree Programme Director or Supervisory Team as soon as possible to discuss your Interruption of Studies requirements (See: [Interruption of studies](#)).

If you plan to take Maternity Leave, you should inform your Academic Unit at least 15 weeks before your baby is due, so that your Interruption of Studies can be organised. If you are a Doctoral or MPhil student, you will need to provide your Academic Unit with a copy of your MATB1 certificate, which confirms your official due date. MATB1 certificates are provided by your midwife once you are 20 weeks pregnant.

If you are a Doctoral or MPhil student, the earliest you can take Maternity Leave is 11 weeks before your baby is due. However, if your baby arrives before the start of your planned Maternity Leave, or if you are unable to study due to a pregnancy-related illness in the 4-week period before your baby is due, your Maternity Leave will begin automatically.

While you are on Maternity Leave, you can't take other types of absences such as sick leave or annual leave – any absence is treated as part of the Maternity Leave until the end of your Maternity Leave period.

1.4. Pregnancy loss

In the event that your pregnancy does not end in a live birth (for example, if you experience a miscarriage, molar pregnancy, ectopic pregnancy, stillbirth, or you choose to have a termination for medical reasons), we understand that you may need to take some time away from your studies to recover, grieve and process your experiences.

In such an event, you are still entitled to take an interruption of studies, and you are encouraged to contact your Academic Unit to discuss whether this may be appropriate for you and your circumstances. There may be funding implications of this for students who receive UKRI studentships, so please ensure that your funder is kept aware of your circumstances and agrees to any extended period of absence.

You may find it useful to contact the Student Health and Wellbeing Service for support following your loss. Specific advice and support following pregnancy loss (including what your legal rights are) can be obtained from the [Miscarriage Association](#).

2. Adoption

Please note that the below provisions apply only to students who have been matched with a child or are undergoing the Fostering to Adopt process. It does not cover students who are adopting step-children or members of their own family.

If you are adopting as a couple, one person in the couple will be the 'primary adopter' and the second person will be the 'secondary adopter'.

2.1. Informing the University

We understand that when you are adopting, you may not know exactly when you will be matched with a child so it can be difficult to make firm plans. As such, we encourage anyone going through the adoption process to speak to their Personal Tutor or Supervisory Team as early as possible to inform them of any potential change in circumstances.

You should inform your Academic Unit as soon as practicable after you receive notification that you have been matched with a child/children. Your Academic Unit will discuss with you whether you require any adjustments to your programme of study, including time off for pre-adoption visits or meetings with social workers. A written summary of this discussion and any agreed arrangement will be made and this will be shared with you. The University will also ask your permission to share details of these arrangement with appropriate University employees.

Adjustments to assignments (such as permission to defer assessments) should be requested via the [PEC process](#) (Taught Students) and your Academic Unit will communicate any agreed adjustments to you via this process. Adjustments to deadlines for Research Students (such as Annual Progress Review deadlines) should be requested via the [PGR Code of Practice System](#) (Doctoral and MPhil students) and your Graduate School will communicate any agreed adjustments to you via this system.

Information you give to the University about your intention to adopt will be treated as strictly confidential, handled sensitively, and will only be shared with University employees who have a legitimate business need to know. We will normally talk to you in advance of disclosing any of your personal information to let you know who will be informed and why. This is to ensure that you consent to your details being shared.

2.2. Adoption Leave

If you are the sole or primary adopter, you are entitled to take adoption leave from your programme for up to 52 weeks. This is in addition to any pre-adoption visits or meetings you need to attend before your child is placed with you.

Secondary adopters are entitled to take up to two weeks' leave, which can be taken anytime from the date the child is placed with you up to three months following the adoption placement. If you require additional leave, you may wish to discuss with your Academic Unit whether a further interruption of studies would be appropriate for you (*please see [5. Interruption of Studies](#), below*).

The entitlement above is the same whether you are adopting one child or multiple children.

3. Surrogacy

Surrogacy is where someone agrees to be the gestational carrier of a child for another person or persons. It is often supported by a legal agreement and the intended parents will need to apply for a parental order following the birth to become the child's legal parents. At least one of the intended parents must be biologically related to the child for the situation to be considered a surrogate arrangement.

If you have a partner and you are both the child's intended parents, one person will be classed as the 'primary parent' and the other person will be the 'secondary parent.' You do not have to be genetically related to the child to be the primary parent.

If you are the gestational carrier in a surrogate arrangement, please see [1. Your own pregnancy](#), above.

3.1. Informing the University

It is advisable to inform the University as soon as possible once you know your gestational carrier is pregnant, but this should be done at least 15 weeks before your baby's due date if you plan to take parental leave.

3.2. Parental Leave

If you are the baby's sole or primary parent, you are entitled to take parental leave from your programme for up to 52 weeks. You should speak to your Degree Programme Director or Supervisory Team to discuss any Interruption of Studies arrangements.

Secondary parents are entitled to take up to two weeks' leave, which can be taken anytime from the date your baby is born up to three months after the birth. If you require additional leave, you may wish to discuss with your Academic Unit whether a further interruption of studies would be appropriate for you (*please see [5. Interruption of Studies](#) below*).

The entitlement above is the same whether you are expecting one child or multiple children.

4. Your partner's pregnancy

If your partner is pregnant and you expect to have parental responsibilities for the child, you are entitled to request time out of study.

4.1. Informing the University

If you find out that you are about to become a parent, you are encouraged to speak to your Personal Tutor or Supervisory Team in the first instance.

4.2. Parental Leave

You are entitled to take reasonable time off for antenatal appointments during your partner's pregnancy (for example, to attend scans or other medical appointments), and for additional medical appointments following the birth of your baby.

You are also entitled to up to two week's maternity support leave, which can be taken at any time between your partner's 29th week of pregnancy (11 weeks before your baby's due date) and up to three months following the birth.

You should speak to your Personal Tutor or Supervisory Team to discuss taking any additional time off either before or after the birth of your child. We will always try to be flexible in accommodating your preferences, but this will necessarily be more limited in some programmes than others.

If you are a Doctoral /MPhil student taking a period of maternity support leave, there will normally be no change to your funding end date or submission deadline, unless you apply for a formal interruption of studies via the [PGR Code of Practice System](#).

5. Interruption of Studies

As part of your initial discussion with your Academic Unit, we may discuss with you your requirements for an interruption of studies, for example when this should happen and how long it might last. The University will always try to balance your wishes against the academic requirements of your programme of study.

You do not normally have to pay tuition fees during any interruption of studies.

If you are an undergraduate student, any funding you receive (for example through Student Loans) will stop when any interruption of studies begins. The University will automatically

notify the Student Loans Company and any other national UK fee providers of the dates of your interruption.

If you self-fund your degree, or are a privately sponsored student, you are advised to contact the [Tuition Fees Team](#) to ensure that you receive a refund of your tuition fees during any interruption of studies.

Doctoral and MPhil students wishing to interrupt their studies, should note the additional guidance given in [Appendix 1](#).

6. Access to Financial Support

For undergraduate/taught Masters /Research Masters students

You may be able to apply for discretionary funding from Student Finance England (or equivalent organisations if you are not normally resident in England) – please contact either the [Financial Support Team](#) in the Student Health and Wellbeing Service or the [Student Advice Centre](#) of the Students' Union, who will be able to provide you with tailored advice.

For Doctoral/MPhil students

If you are in receipt of a University studentship, you may be entitled to a Doctoral College Parental Leave Bursary during any interruption of studies due to maternity, paternity or adoption leave. Please see [Appendix 1](#) for further information.

7. Student Visa Holders

If you are a Student Visa Holder, you are entitled to up to 52 weeks parental leave (in line with the entitlements outlined above), however you should be aware that there may be potential implications on your visa. You should discuss any potential leave with your Personal Tutor/Supervisory Team and seek advice from the [Visa Support Team](#).

If you are an international student with financial sponsors and are planning to take an extended period of parental leave, you need to contact your sponsor(s) as soon as possible to inform them of your impending change of circumstances. You should agree a plan of action with them, which may include a formal interruption of studies, a deferral of studies, and a date when you plan to resume your studies.

The University is obliged to report any formal interruption of studies to the UK Home Office and you would normally be required to return to your home country during your period of interruption. Depending on your specific circumstances, the Home Office may remove your right to remain in the UK by curtailing your Student Visa.

Student Visa Holders who are not entitled to any maternity/adoption benefits in the UK may prefer to return to their home country for the duration of their parental leave. Please note that some airlines have restrictions on carrying heavily pregnant passengers, so it is advisable to consult the relevant airline policies in advance of making firm plans.

For Doctoral/MPhil students: Please see [Appendix 1](#).

8. Students in University Accommodation

If you are living in University accommodation and are about to become a parent, you may find that your living arrangements are no longer suitable for you due to health and safety reasons. It is also important to check your tenancy agreement, since it may only allow for single occupancy.

You are encouraged to discuss your circumstances with the [Accommodation Team](#) as soon as possible. If required, support will be offered in finding suitable accommodation options for your individual circumstances.

The University has a small number of flats suitable for family accommodation, although there is generally a waiting list for these. The Accommodation Team can also provide you with advice about finding non-University owned family accommodation if this is appropriate for your circumstances.

9. Babies and Children on Campus

We understand that you may want to bring your children onto campus to meet your friends and tutors, and there are several spaces on campus where babies and children are welcome for short visits. This includes general public areas and in one-to-one tutorials/supervision meetings (providing you have the prior permission of your Personal Tutor/Supervisory Team). Babies and children should not be brought into areas where group teaching or quiet study takes place, or there is a possibility of risk to their health and safety (such as workshops or laboratories).

The University is not designed to take account of the specific needs of babies or children, so it is important that all children on campus are closely supervised by their parent or carer at all times. The University cannot be held responsible for unattended children on University property.

APPENDIX 1:

Additional Guidance for Postgraduate Research (Doctoral and MPhil) Students

1. Submission deadlines

If your Supervisory Team has approved an absence of parental leave of up to 4 weeks, your submission deadline will not normally change, since you have not requested a formal interruption of studies. In such cases, your parental leave is treated as additional annual leave. Alternatively, if you want to adjust your submission deadline by up to 4 weeks to reflect your period of parental leave, you can request a formal interruption of studies via the PGR Code of Practice system.

If you wish to take more than 4 weeks' parental leave, you will be required to submit a request to formally interrupt your studies. If this interruption is approved, your submission deadline will be adjusted to reflect the amount of leave you have taken.

2. Funding

Not all funders provide financial support to cover student parental leave and some funders may only support you to take unpaid leave.

If you are in receipt of a studentship or sponsorship from an external funding body, please check the terms and conditions of your funding agreement for details of any financial support you may be entitled to during your period of parental leave.

Please note that the terms and conditions provided by any Employer, Funder or attached to your Visa may differ from the entitlements set out in this document. For the avoidance of doubt, the terms and conditions provided by any Employer, Funder or attached to your Visa will take precedence over University Policy.

For further information about funding sources available, please see [6. Access to Financial Support](#).

o University Studentships

If you are in receipt of a University studentship, you may be entitled to financial support via a Doctoral College Parental Leave Bursary during any formal interruption of studies you take. For further information, please consult the [Doctoral College Parental Leave Bursary Guidance](#).

o UKRI funded students

If you are funded by a UK Research and Innovations studentship which was awarded through the University, and you receive a full maintenance stipend, you may be entitled to financial support during any period of parental leave. For further information, please refer to the [UKRI Training Grant Terms and Conditions](#).

3. Student visa holders

If you wish to remain in the UK during your period of parental leave, the University will support you to take one month of parental leave without any impact on your annual leave entitlement. This can be followed by a further period of up to two weeks of annual leave without any impact on your Student Visa.

If you wish to take leave for more than one month (plus two weeks annual leave) and up to 52 weeks, you will need to request a formal interruption of studies via the PGR Code of Practice System. If approved, this interruption will extend your thesis submission deadline and will likely have an impact on your Visa.

The University is obliged to report any formal interruption of studies to the UK Home Office and you would normally be required to return to your home country during your period of interruption. Depending on your specific circumstances, the Home Office may remove your right to remain in the UK. For advice and guidance on visa implications, please contact the University's [Visa Support Team](#).

APPENDIX 2: Guidance for Colleagues

The University expects Academic Units to ensure that student parents and pregnant students, are shown as much flexibility as possible to facilitate their continued learning. This includes ensuring that students are aware of the adjustments available to them under the University Personal Extenuating Circumstances procedure (Taught Students) or Mitigating Circumstances procedures (Doctoral/MPhil students).

If a student discloses to you any circumstances covered by this policy, any information you receive should be treated confidentially and with a high level of sensitivity.

1. Adjustments to assessments and programme of study

Although each request for adjustments should be dealt with on an individual basis, it may be useful to discuss the following options with pregnant students or student parents:

- **Interruption of studies** for a pre-determined period of time;
- **DPD/Supervisor requests**, for example, to transfer to part-time study;
- **Authorised periods of absence** for example, for pre-adoption meetings, antenatal/postnatal appointments;
- **Appropriate pastoral support**, particularly where a student is returning from a prolonged period of absence and needs to reintegrate into their programme of study.

The student may also find it helpful if you discuss with them the support available via normal University procedures, such as:

- [Personal Extenuating Circumstances](#), for adjustments and deferrals of assessments;
- [Support to Study Procedure](#), for students whose personal circumstances or current health or wellbeing conditions are affecting their ability to engage with their programme of study or function within the University environment;
- [Student Sickness and Absence Procedure](#), which explains to students how they should notify the University of any periods of absence;
- [Change of Circumstances Procedure](#) to request a formal interruption of studies (taught students);
- [Change of Circumstances Procedure](#) to request a formal interruption of studies (research students).

It is important that the wishes of the student are taken into account and no standard set of arrangements is imposed. All decisions should be based on discussion with or input from the student.

An appropriate degree of flexibility should be extended to all students under this policy, although care must be taken to ensure that academic standards are not compromised. The Academic Unit should strive to achieve a balance between ensuring student parents and pregnant students are not unduly disadvantaged, without giving them undue special treatment. The University will try to meet reasonable requests for adjustments and flexibility, although students should be aware that adjustments may not always be possible.

Where any request for adjustments is refused, the reasons for the refusal should be provided to the student in writing.

Requests for adjustments under this policy should be kept separate from specific arrangements or adjustments already agreed by the University (for example, under a Student Support Plan). This is to ensure that it is clear which arrangements relate to a student's particular circumstance, and for how long such an arrangement is required.

2. Checklist for colleagues when discussing the needs of pregnant students

The following checklist is an aid to guide discussions with a pregnant student. It is good practice for any special arrangements or action points to be documents and to ensure that the student receives a written record of the meeting and any agreed adjustments. As part of the discussion, you should let the student know who else will need to be made aware of their circumstances and seek the student's consent to share details with necessary colleagues.

- Direct the student to this Policy and Guidance Document
- Has the student updated their contact information on S3P (including their emergency contact details)?
- Direct the student to sources of support and advice within the University, including:
 - o Their Personal Tutor/Supervisory Team (if this is not you)
 - o Student Health and Wellbeing Service
 - o Student Advice Centre of the Students' Union
 - o Financial Wellbeing Advisors
 - o Accommodation Advice
 - o Visa Support Advice
- What is the student's expected due date?
- Are they aware of how to access antenatal care? If not, direct them to contact their GP.
- Does the student have any initial thoughts about potential maternity leave period or interruption of studies?
- Discuss the possible implications for the student's programme of student – for example, assessment, placements, field trips, repeat study requirements.
- Do other people need to be consulted? If so, make sure you gain the student's consent before discussing their personal details with anyone else.
- Do any elements of the student's programme of study require a risk assessment? (Does the student handle dangerous chemicals? Do they regularly work alone? Are they required to travel or undertake field work?) If so, who will complete the risk assessment(s) and who will advise the student of the requirements identified?
- How will absences (e.g. for medical or antenatal appointments) be handled?
- Are there any implications for assessments and/or submission deadlines?
- Implications on funding and sources of advice available to them.
- Implications for Student Visa Holders.
- Does the student require any adjustments to ensure that they are able to study effectively during the pregnancy?

- Does the student foresee the need for any adjustments when they return to their studies following the pregnancy? (Ensure the student knows that this can remain open to discussion)
- Explain to the student how adjustments can be requested via the PEC process/Mitigating Circumstances process;
- Ensure the student is happy with the outcomes of the meeting, has no additional questions or concerns, and consents to their information being shared with other named colleagues.