

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

POLICY ON STUDENT PREGNANCY, MATERNITY, PATERNITY AND ADOPTION

1. INTRODUCTION

These guidelines provide advice and guidance to registered students or prospective students who are pregnant or become parents at the commencement of or during their studies.

Although they are focussed on study related issues they aim to give information on other sources of advice. The document is also intended to be used as a point of reference by staff who have a role in advising students and whose advice and guidance may be sought on these issues.

The Equality Act 2010 introduced a new protection from discrimination for students during pregnancy and maternity. This policy has been developed using the Equality Challenge Unit guidance *Student pregnancy and maternity: implications for higher education institutions*.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

The University aims to provide an environment where students are supported fairly and with dignity and respect, including during maternity, paternity, the process of adoption and whilst breastfeeding.

The University believes that becoming pregnant or caring for a very young child should not prevent a student from succeeding in their studies. It will therefore apply Regulations as flexibly as possible, seeking to ensure that students are not disadvantaged whilst ensuring that academic standards are maintained. The degree of flexibility which can be applied will vary according to the programme of study.

Staff will demonstrate a supportive approach when discussing issues with students and will advise them of other available services if they are unable to provide appropriate advice themselves. Any information provided by a student will be handled confidentially and will only be shared with others with the student's consent.

3. DISCLOSURE

Students are not required to notify their department if they become pregnant or a parent while they are a student. However, it should be noted that departments will not be able to consider whether it is possible to adopt a flexible approach or to provide appropriate support, or to conduct a health and safety assessment if they are unaware of the circumstances.

For certain programmes there may be a requirement that students notify their departments in confidence for health and safety reasons.

4. SUMMARY OF KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

The University will take all possible steps to ensure that:

- where a student is or becomes pregnant during her period of registration or is adopting a child during her/his period of registration at the University it responds flexibly to any requests for reasonable adjustments which are within the regulations and maintain academic standards
- this policy is published and that relevant staff are aware of it
- staff are aware that support and guidance is available for conducting health and safety assessments through the Safety Services Office
- staff and students are aware that advice can be sought from the Registry/Graduate School Office , Student Finance Advisers and other services as required
- this policy is monitored and reviewed on a regular basis

Departments and Schools will take all possible steps to ensure that:

- staff and students are made aware of this policy
- once a disclosure of pregnancy is made the Head of Department should ensure that a member of staff is identified with responsibility to review the health and safety risks to the student and her unborn child and to modify any procedures which relate to the student if required. The University guidance for New and Expectant Mothers at work identifies the issues to be considered

<https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/safety-services/documents/pdfs/mothers.pdf>

- a support plan is completed in conjunction with the student
- reasonable adjustments are made to support the student in completing her programme of study, providing these are in accordance with the Regulations and the maintenance of academic standards
- if requested a female member of staff is identified with whom the student can discuss her support needs
- students are aware of sources of advice and support
- where a pregnancy is disclosed to a member of staff this should be treated confidentially and information should only be passed on to other staff with the consent of the student
- students are kept up to date with developments in their field
- they facilitate a smooth return from maternity/adoption related absence

Students

Although students are not required to advise their department if they are pregnant they are encouraged to disclose a pregnancy in confidence at an early stage, particularly if their programme of study carries potential health and safety risks for the mother her unborn child. In deciding whether or not to notify their department a student might wish to consider the following:

- whether there are any elements of her programme of study which could present a health risk to either herself or her unborn child
- whether absences, for example for ante-natal appointments might impact on her studies which it would be helpful for her department to take into account
- whether other bodies, such as sponsors need to be informed

5. STUDENTS ON TAUGHT PROGRAMMES

Students on taught programmes are strongly recommended to request a meeting with their personal tutor or another member of staff to discuss and agree a plan for their studies.

Potential risks to the student should be reviewed by the Department and where necessary adjustments made to procedures.

Discussions should also take place about agreeing any periods of absence and making arrangements for the student to catch up on any missed lectures/tutorials so she is not placed at a disadvantage.

Consideration may also need to be given to whether any special arrangements need to be put in place with respect to placements or fieldwork.

Advice should also be given on how to apply for suspension of studies to allow for a period of maternity or adoption related absence, if required by the student.

6. POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTS

Postgraduate research students are strongly recommended to request a meeting with a member of their supervisory team or the Postgraduate Tutor to discuss and agree a plan for their studies, including arrangements for taking time off for medical appointments.

Potential risks to the student should be reviewed by the Department and where necessary adjustments made to procedures.

Advice should also be given on how to apply for suspension of studies to allow for a period of maternity related absence, if required by the student.

7. MATERNITY RELATED ABSENCE AND FUNDING

Students will normally be permitted to formally suspend their studies for up to one calendar year for maternity/adoption leave. The length of time will be determined by a student's personal circumstances and the structure of the programme of study.

Students who choose not to formally suspend their studies are required to take two weeks compulsory leave of absence immediately following the birth of their child via an authorised absence. An application for such an absence should, whenever possible, be made three months before it is due to commence.

If a student decides not to take a suspension of studies as a period of maternity leave the expectation is that she will continue to engage with her studies in the normal way, including attending and submitting work as required. Where a student chooses not to take a period of suspension and subsequently requires an extension to registration this will be considered in the usual way in accordance with Senate Regulation 2 or 9 and the appropriate tuition fees will be charged. Requests for periods of suspension or adjustment of fees cannot be made retrospectively.

Undergraduate students should note that funding will usually stop when their suspension of studies starts. Details on student finance can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/browse/education/student-finance>

Advice on general financial matters and any entitlements can also be obtained from the Student Welfare Service <http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ssds/welfare>

Students receiving funding from a sponsor should contact their sponsor for further advice.

Research students who are funded through a Research Council or University studentship are allowed a six month period of paid maternity leave followed by a further six months unpaid, if required.

8. ARRANGEMENTS FOR TAKING MATERNITY RELATED ABSENCE

A Student should meet with her personal tutor, supervisor or another member of staff to discuss how the pregnancy is likely to impact on her studies and, where required, arrangements for a suspension of studies. The student and their tutor/supervisor will need to consider the implications with respect to the programme of study.

If a student experiences complications as a result of her pregnancy and needs additional time off a claim may need to be made under the mitigating circumstances regulations (see Senate Regulation 7.99 to 7.114). Pregnancy itself is not viewed as a mitigating circumstance but if students suffer a pregnancy-related illness or other complications which have implications for attendance and assessment this would be viewed as mitigating circumstances. Any claim for consideration of mitigating circumstances should be made in accordance with the above Regulations, through the submission of a Mitigating Circumstances Form.

Students should request a suspension to studies for the required period in accordance with Senate Regulation 2.35-2.39.

For students on taught programmes a request should be made on the suspension form which can be found at <http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/sas2/studentrecord>

For postgraduate research students a request should be made on the suspension form which can be found at <http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/gradschool/forms>

9. VISA ISSUES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International students should seek advice from the International Officers (Student Welfare Service) at the earliest opportunity to determine whether there are any implications for their visa status. In exceptional cases, International Officers may seek further advice from the UKVI to determine appropriate options for a particular student.

The University is required to report any Tier 4 students who take a suspension of studies to the UKVI and there may be a requirement that they leave the UK.

International students who have a financial sponsor should also contact them for further advice and guidance.

10. ACCOMMODATION

Students living in University accommodation who find this is no longer suitable during their pregnancy should seek advice from Accommodation and Residential Services.

11. STUDY ABROAD AND WORK PLACEMENTS AND FIELD TRIPS

Where a student becomes pregnant before or during a period of study abroad or a work placement there may be circumstances where the University is limited in the support it can provide. Advice may be sought from the Department and/or the International Office. Where there is judged to be a risk to the student or her unborn child she may be strongly advised to suspend her studies or, in certain cases, it may be possible for a student to transfer to a variant of a degree programme which does not require a period of study abroad. Consideration of travel/study abroad/work placements should be informed by the advice of a registered midwife or doctor.

Where a student is on placement she will be required to follow her employer's regulations/policies in addition to University requirements.

12. ADOPTION LEAVE

Students who are the primary adopter may apply for a suspension of studies of up to one year as outlined above. Only one member of a couple jointly adopting may apply for adoption leave and this applies regardless of whether one or both members of a couple are students. The other member of a couple may apply for paternity or maternity support leave.

Adoption leave will be unpaid unless the student is entitled to Statutory Adoption Pay or there is provision from their funder for payment. Where students are in employment advice should be sought from their employer.

Research students funded through Research Council or University studentships will be entitled to six months paid adoption leave and a further six months unpaid, if required.

13. STUDENTS WHOSE PARTNER IS PREGNANT OR ADOPTING

Programmes are usually flexible enough to allow students to take time off from their studies to accompany their partner to ante natal and post natal appointment. Students should consult their personal tutor or supervisor to agree arrangements for taking leave and catching up on work missed.

A student whose partner is pregnant or who is adopting a child may apply to take two weeks paternity/maternity support leave, in consultation with their department and in accordance with the University's authorised absence policy. This is usually unpaid unless a student is also in employment or, if their funding body allows a period of paid paternity leave.

Students who are sponsored should contact their sponsor to ascertain what arrangements apply to them.

14. BABIES AND CHILDREN ON CAMPUS

Babies and children are allowed on public areas of campus but must be supervised at all times. Babies and children will not be allowed in any areas where there is a health and safety risk, for example laboratories, under any circumstances. Babies and children will not normally be allowed at a teaching session or assessment event. However, students who are breastfeeding or have a baby under 26 weeks are protected under the Equality Act 2010 so should contact their personal tutor or supervisor to discuss what appropriate arrangements can be made.

15. BREAST FEEDING FACILITIES

There is a room available on campus for breast feeding/expressing milk which has storage facilities and is located in the Attenborough Seminar Block (Room 103). Students wishing to make use of this facility can obtain further information from the Equalities Unit.

16. CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENTS

Students may apply for places for their children at the University Nursery and can seek advice from the Student Welfare Service about other childcare arrangements. Further information about the University Nursery can be found at <http://www2.le.ac.uk/institution/nursery>