LEARNING AND TEACHING SUPPORT HANDBOOK

Chapter 25 - Student Pregnancy and Family Leave Policy

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1. Introduction

1.1 The University of Exeter is committed to supporting students who are pregnant or who have caring responsibility for very young children (defined for this purpose as under 26 weeks) as a result of their pregnancy maternity or new parent leave. 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 alongside existing University procedures, such as for Interruption (see the TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 13 for taught; see the TQA PGR <u>Handbook</u>, <u>Chapter 5</u> 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 their studies.

2. Scope

- 2.1 The Policy should be used in the following circumstances:
 - Any student (undergraduate, postgraduate taught or postgraduate research) a. who becomes pregnant during study.
 - Any applicant who will be pregnant when commencing studies. b.
 - Any student who has given birth within the last 26 weeks. c.
 - Any student whose partner is pregnant, where the student will assume caring d. responsibility for the child. This provision also applies to same-sex partners.
 - Any student who becomes a parent through the process of adoption. e.

3. **Principles**

- 3.1 The following principles underpin this Policy:
 - 3.1.1 Pregnancy, maternity or adoption 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, maternity, or adoption through a detailed <u>Pregnancy & New Parent Support and</u> 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/family 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

- A student who believes they may be pregnant or has confirmed a pregnancy is strongly 4.1 advised to contact their doctor, to arrange for appropriate medical advice and antenatal 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 to facilitate the support and planning process, to

enable them to manage the pregnancy and maternity/family leave 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/ PGR Personal Tutor, Senior Tutor, Supervisor, or a member of Professional Services staff with responsibility for pastoral support and welfare.
- In the event that a student remains uncertain about whether to disclose, or is not sure 4.5 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/family .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 <u>Pregnancy</u>, <u>Maternity & New Parent Support and Adjustments</u> 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 (less than 26 weeks) at the time of enrolment **should** notify the <u>Head of Admissions</u> 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.

- Where a pregnancy/maternity/family related absence is planned, the student should 4.9 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 doctor when the pregnancy has been confirmed, or an equivalent document for students based overseas.
- 4.10 Maternity leave **may** commence up to 11 weeks before the expected week of childbirth. Adoption leave **may** commence up to 11 weeks before the expected week of placement.
- 4.11 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 <u>Pregnancy</u>, <u>Maternity</u> & New Parent Support and Adjustments Plan (see 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.
- 4.12 International students should seek advice from the International Student Community Support Office regarding the implications of any pregnancy-related absence on their visa, which will be considered within the Pregnancy, Maternity & New Parent Support and Adjustments Plan (see Annex A). 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.
- 4.13 Students should seek advice about potential implications for their funding of any maternity/ family 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/ family -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 Student Pregnancy and Family Leave PGR Funding policy. It is imperative that all students seek early advice as any interruption of studies could have serious consequences in relation to funding arrangements during or following maternity/ family leave.

4.14 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 <u>Children</u>, <u>Young Persons and Vulnerable Adults Standard</u> must be met, further information can be found on the Children, young people and vulnerable adults on campus page at the University's Health and Safety Hub. Otherwise, consideration will be given to the options for flexibility and adjustment as part of the <u>Pregnancy</u>, <u>Maternity</u> & New Parent Support and Adjustments Plan (see 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/family leave 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/ family leave.
- 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 for new parents.
- 5.3 Staff who are advising students on the impact of the pregnancy and maternity/family leave **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 <u>Annex B: Further Information for new parents</u>.
- 5.5 Staff who are responsible for undertaking the <u>Pregnancy</u>, <u>Maternity & New Parent</u> Support and Adjustments Plan (see 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/ family leave 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, Maternity and New Parent Support and Adjustments Plan

- 6.1 Where a student has disclosed a pregnancy to a member of staff, that member of staff may seek advice from the <u>Head of Education Support</u>/ the <u>Doctoral College Quality</u> <u>Development Manager</u>, or nominee to identify appropriate staff to support the student in developing a <u>Pregnancy</u>, <u>Maternity & New Parent Support and Adjustments Plan (see</u> Annex A).
- 6.2 The student **should** be supported in developing the Plan by a member of staff from their Faculty who has sufficient understanding of the academic structure of the student's programme of study to consider the impact of pregnancy and maternity/ family leave 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/New Parent 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.
- The Plan **should** consider scope for flexibility around arrangements for study and 6.4 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: 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: TQALTS Handbook 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.
- A Template for the Pregnancy, Maternity and New Parent Support and Adjustments 6.7 Plan can be found in Annex A.

7. Sickness during pregnancy

- 7.1 If during pregnancy, a student is unable to attend studies due to illness, the normal procedures for sickness absence reporting **should** be followed.
- 7.2 However, any period of pregnancy related sick leave or interruption beyond the 36th week of pregnancy may trigger the start of maternity leave. The student may be required to provide confirmation from their doctor that they are fit to return to study at the end of the interruption period for maternity leave.

8. Phased return to study

- 8.1 Taught students may be eligible for a phased return to study following a period of maternity, adoption or other family leave described in this policy, but they should be mindful that programme structures, timetabling and assessments may limit their options. Students **should** discuss their options with their Pastoral Mentor.
- 8.2 PGR students **may** consider a phased return to study following a period of maternity, adoption or other family leave described by this policy. For further details, please refer to the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 18 PGR Student Absence Policy.
- 8.3 PGRs in receipt of funding should refer to the TQA LTS Handbook Chapter 25 Annex C - Student Pregnancy and Family Leave PGR Funding policy.

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

- 9.1 Keeping in Touch (KIT) days are intended to help students on maternity/family 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/family or adoption leave. By maintaining a minimal, but regular, presence during maternity/family/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.
- 9.2 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).
- 9.3 There can be up to 10 days taken during the period of maternity/family/adoption leave.
- 9.4 All students attending KIT days must have completed the <u>Pregnancy</u>, <u>Maternity & New</u> Parent Support Plan (see Annex A) and the New and Expectant Parents at Work Risk Assessment form (TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 25, Annex D) and have the work itself approved before a student may attend.
- 9.5 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.

- 9.6 PGRs intending to complete field work or other off-campus visits should consider the Staff and PGR Travel Policy & Advice, details of which can be accessed via the University's Travel SharePoint site.
- PGRs are required to plan their KIT Days in advance of taking them and have completed 9.7 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.
- 9.8 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).
- 9.9 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.
- 9.10 Any research/study carried out on any KIT Day will count as one full day.
- 9.11 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.

10. Arrangements for Partners (including same sex partners)

- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 Students in such circumstances are encouraged to discuss their situation with their Pastoral Mentor/PGR Personal Tutor, Senior Tutor, Supervisor, 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 <u>Students' Guild</u> (Exeter campuses) or the <u>Students' Union</u> (Cornwall campuses).
- 10.3 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.
- 10.4 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 the 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.
- 10.5 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.
- 10.6 International students who are considering absence as a result of their partner's pregnancy and maternity/family leave **should** seek advice from the <u>International</u> Student Community and 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.

10.7 The University offers co-parental leave for funded PGR students, subject to strict eligibility criteria of the student and their partner. 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, Annexe E1: Co-Parental leave for PGRs and Annex E2: Co-Parental Leave Request Form for Postgraduate Research Students.

11. **Arrangements for Adoption**

- 11.1 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.
- 11.2 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.
- 11.3 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/family related absence etc. The other partner will be afforded the same entitlements as is outlined for partners in Section 7 above.

12. **Neonatal Care Leave**

- 12.1 Neonatal Care leave is available to all students who have had a baby born on or after 6th April 2025 who meet the eligibility criteria described below.
- 12.2 PGR students in receipt of funding may be eligible for neonatal care leave funding, and are advised to refer to Annex C - Pregnancy and Family Leave PGR funding policy.
- 12.3 Eligibility

- 12.3.1 Neonatal care means a child who is in receipt of neonatal care in a hospital setting. Neonatal care is separate from paediatric care, which is not covered by this kind of leave. Students needing to take time off to support children in paediatric care should consider interrupting their studies.
- 12.3.2 Both parents may take Neonatal care leave. Neonatal care leave can only be taken to care for the child who received neonatal care. Neonatal care leave is accrued per child per time so if there are multiple births and they all require neonatal care at different times then this counts as one period of leave.
- 12.3.3 If eligible, students will be entitled to neonatal care leave for the equivalent number of weeks their baby received neonatal care, up to a maximum of 12 weeks.

12.4 Taking neonatal care leave

- 12.4.1 Neonatal care leave must be taken consecutively with the maternity or adoption leave period - the neonatal care leave will be added to the end of the maternity/adoption leave period. Students must email their Info Point/Hub/PGR <u>Support Team</u> with the following details: the person claiming leave, the child's date of birth, evidence of adoption, the date the child started to receive neonatal care or dates if more than once, the date the child's neonatal care ended (if it has not, this must be followed up when care has ended) and a declaration that students intend to care for the child during the weeks requested and that you meet the eligibility criteria.
- 12.4.2 Taught students may include neonatal care leave in their total interruption period alongside maternity/adoption leave. They may also refer to the TQA APA Handbook, Chapter 10, Mitigation for further information.
- 12.4.3 PGR students **may** recognise their neonatal care leave in 2 ways: either by increasing their period of interruption for maternity, adoption or neonatal care leave, or they may request an extension to their period. PGRs needing to take neonatal care leave are advised to contact their <u>PGR Support Team</u> in the first instance to discuss their individual circumstances.

13. Difficulties in Pregnancy; Termination, Miscarriage and Stillbirth

- 13.1 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 for new parents.
- 13.2 If the student decides to terminate a pregnancy, they 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.
- 13.3 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.
- 13.4 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.

14. Death of a birth parent/primary adopter during the maternity, adoption or family leave period

- 14.1 The student partner is eligible for leave on the same basis as the birth parent or main adopter if the birth parent or main adopter dies during or shortly before the period of maternity or adoption leave.
- 14.2 Funded PGRs in this position are advised to contact their PGR Support Team in the first instance to discuss their individual circumstances and funding options.