



Student pregnancy and maternity - guidance for staff

1. Introduction

This document offers guidance to University of Worcester staff on how best to support a student who becomes pregnant or has a very young child during her time as a student. It also covers support to fathers. Much of the content of this document is based on 'Student pregnancy and maternity: implications for higher education institutions' written and compiled by Ellen Pugh and published by the Equality Challenge Unit in 2010.

1.2 Information and guidance to students is available at www.worc.ac.uk/studentsupport/students-who-are-pregnant..

1.3 Some staff can be concerned about the right language to use when discussing a student's pregnancy or maternity. The following guidelines may be helpful.

If a student chooses not to proceed with her pregnancy, using the terms "**embryo and foetus**" may be most appropriate. These are scientific terms used to describe the process of development of the fertilised egg. During the first eight weeks the cells are referred to as an embryo. The term foetus refers to developments from nine weeks onwards. Scientifically, a foetus is not considered to be a baby until birth.

If a student chooses to proceed with their pregnancy, using the term "**baby**" is likely to be more appropriate. This is also the case if a woman miscarries, has a still birth or terminates their pregnancy for reasons relating to their health or the health of the baby. Using the term "embryo or foetus" may cause offence in these circumstances.

For the purposes of this guidance, the term baby will be used throughout.

2. Legal protection for students during pregnancy and maternity

2.1 The Equality Act 2010 significantly strengthened the legal protection for students (including applicants) during pregnancy and maternity. The Act considers pregnancy and maternity to be a protected characteristic and prohibits discrimination on these grounds.

2.2 Section 17 of the Act expands the protection from discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy and maternity, which already exists for women in the workplace and vocational training, to women outside the workplace. In doing so, the Act specifically mentions the higher education sector. Under the Act, discrimination can occur against a student because of her pregnancy or because she has given birth if:

- the student is treated unfavourably because of her pregnancy;

- within 26 weeks of the day of giving birth the student is treated unfavourably because she has given birth; this also applies in cases of miscarriage, still birth and neonatal death provided more than 24 weeks of the pregnancy has elapsed
- the student is treated unfavourably because she is breast-feeding, and the child is less than 26 weeks old; if the child is more than 26 weeks old, unfavourable treatment because of breastfeeding is likely to constitute sex discrimination

2.3 There is no protection afforded for discrimination that occurs by being associated with someone who is pregnant or in a period of maternity or being perceived to be pregnant or in a period of maternity. However, if a woman's partner is treated unfavourably because of her pregnancy or because she has given birth, this may constitute sex discrimination.

2.4 Under the Act, it is unlawful to discriminate against applicants and students in relation to admissions; the provision of education; access to any benefit, facility or service and disciplinary proceedings. The protected characteristic of pregnancy and maternity is included in the public sector equality duty (PSED) of the Equality Act. The PSED requires the university to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it and
- foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

3. Finding out about a student's pregnancy

3.1 When a student informs the university that she is pregnant, it is important that she receives consistent, unbiased support and advice to enable her to make informed choices and that it is important that she is not judged negatively or asked inappropriate questions, such as:

- Will you have an abortion?
- Are you sure you're ready for this at your age?
- Isn't your degree or research more important to you at this point in your life?

3.2 A student does not have to inform the university of her pregnancy. However, the university will be unable to provide individualised support until the student does so. Existing law does not prevent the university from directly approaching a student who they believe to be pregnant. However, this should only occur if the university is confident that the student is pregnant and there are genuine concerns about her health and safety.

4. Establishing a student's pregnancy

4.1 If a student discloses her pregnancy, it is not necessary to ask for proof.

4.2 If the university needs to take into consideration the impact of the student's pregnancy or maternity on her course attendance or attainment, it is permissible to

ask for evidence of appointments and letters from the student's GP, midwife or health worker.

5. Who should a student inform about her pregnancy?

- 5.1 To ensure the student is fully aware of the support available to her and to co-ordinate arrangements for that support the student should, if she wishes, inform Lucy Sandwell, the Student Community Wellbeing Service Manager (telephone 01905 855104; email l.sandwell@worc.ac.uk).
- 5.2 Not all students will want to continue with their pregnancy, and some may miscarry or have to terminate the pregnancy due to their health or the health of their baby. Consequently, information concerning a student's pregnancy should be treated sensitively and should be passed on only with the student's consent. When and who will inform staff and fellow students about the pregnancy should be agreed at the completion of the Student Support Plan (see 8 below).

6. The student's decisions

- 6.1 Members of staff contacted by a student should not attempt to influence her decisions or assume that the pregnancy is unwanted or unplanned. Assumptions should not be made about whether the student intends to proceed with her pregnancy on the basis of her age, disability, gender identity, race, religion or belief, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, or stage of study or research.
- 6.2 If a student seeks advice from a member of staff on whether or not she should continue with her pregnancy, she should be advised to speak with her GP or the university's student counselling service in Student Services (email cmh@worc.ac.uk). University staff who are not qualified and employed by the university to provide counselling should not attempt to do so under any circumstances.
- 6.3 Students who wish to discuss their pregnancy and how it may affect their studies should be referred to the Student Community Wellbeing Service Manager (see 2.2 above) who can discuss the support available to pregnant students and students who are parents. Alternatively the student may prefer to speak with one of the university counsellors in which case she should email cmh@worc.ac.uk.

7. Health and safety

- 7.1 Pregnancy should not be equated with poor health. However, there are health and safety considerations that arise during pregnancy and breastfeeding, and the risks to which students could be exposed need to be assessed.
- 7.2 The highest risk of damage to the baby is during the first 13 weeks of pregnancy. Consequently, students should be encouraged to notify their institution as early as possible of their pregnancy so that a risk assessment can be conducted. Where a student is unsure whether she will proceed with her pregnancy, it may still be appropriate to conduct a risk assessment. Normally the risk assessment will be completed at the same time as the Student Support Plan.

- 7.3 The risk assessment would normally be carried out by the Student Community Wellbeing Service Manager. However, either may wish to consult one of the student's tutors for advice on aspects of the student's course which may pose a risk.
- 7.4 The level of risk to which a student is exposed will depend on the requirements and nature of her course. For many courses the risks will be low; courses that involve the following are more likely to present greater risks:
- physical activity, including lifting and carrying
 - the use of chemicals, including paints and pesticides
 - exposure to radiation
 - working in hot/cold or pressurised environments.
 - where exposure to infectious disease is a possibility, including schools with young children, laboratory work and healthcare settings.
- 7.5 If a student is required to undertake a placement as part of her course, the university placement tutor or link tutor will liaise with the placement provider to ensure a health and safety assessment is conducted. If fieldwork is a requirement of the course, this will need to be considered within a health and safety assessment. Consideration should also be given to the risks that may arise during examinations.
- 7.6 Where risks are identified during a health and safety assessment, the student and, if necessary, her midwife or GP should be consulted on ways to alleviate or minimise the identified risk.

8. Student support plan

- 8.1 For students who proceed with their pregnancy, a student pregnancy support plan should be used to coordinate support and ensure the student's needs are met during pregnancy, following the birth, and on the student's return to her course. The student should discuss and agree her support plan with the Student Community Wellbeing Service Manager who will, with the student's permission, liaise with other university staff as required.
- 8.2 The support plan is likely to cover the following issues.
- **Communication about the student's pregnancy** – Which members of staff will need to be informed about the student's pregnancy? Who will be responsible for informing members of staff?
 - **Health and safety** – Has a risk assessment been conducted? (see 7 above)
 - **Antenatal care** – When are the student's antenatal appointments? What arrangements will be made to enable her to catch up if any appointments coincide with seminars and lectures?
 - **Examinations and assessments** – Will the student's pregnancy affect her ability to meet coursework deadlines or sit examinations? If so, what measures can be taken to ensure the student meets the requirements of her course? For example, would alternative methods of assessment be appropriate?
 - **Placements and fieldwork** – Is the student required to undertake a placement or fieldwork as part of her course? If so, will her pregnancy affect her ability to complete the required placement or fieldwork? If yes, what measures can be

taken to ensure she can fulfil these requirements? For example, could the student undertake the placement or fieldwork at an earlier stage of her pregnancy, or on her return from maternity-related absence?

- **Study and placements abroad** – If the student is already abroad, does she wish – and will she be able – to complete her programme of study or placement? If she returns home, what arrangements will be made for her to resume her programme of study placement? If the student is required to undertake a programme of study or a placement abroad that she has not started, what arrangements will need to be made with the host institution?
- **Maternity-related absence** – The student may wish to interrupt her study for a year, or she may wish to return as soon as possible after giving birth. When is the student likely to start her maternity-related absence, and when is she likely to return? To ensure appropriate arrangements can be made, students should notify the university at least 15 weeks before the expected birth of their child as to when they would like their maternity-related absence to commence.

8.3 Support plans will need to be reviewed at key stages of the pregnancy, or at key points of the academic year, such as prior to examinations and field trips.

See appendix A for an example of a student support plan.

9. Maternity-related absence

9.1 The arrangements for maternity-related absence apply equally to live births and still births after 24 weeks.

9.2 A student must inform Registry Services of the following in writing at least 15 weeks before the baby is due.

- the date on which she intends to start maternity-related absence
- the length of maternity-related absence that she intends to take and the date on which she intends to return.

9.3 15 weeks' notice should allow sufficient time for the university to liaise with the student, review the student support plan, make any necessary arrangements, and ensure information is communicated as required.

9.4 All students are allowed to take maternity-related absence following the birth of their child. How long a student will take will be determined by her personal circumstances and the structure and content of her course. The university will work with the student to establish a suitable return-to-study date.

9.5 Where course structure or content indicates the need for a student to return to study sooner than she would like to, the reason given will be notified in writing to the student.

9.6 While the length of maternity-related absence students prefer to take will vary, students are required to take as a minimum two weeks' compulsory maternity-related absence, or four weeks if they are on a placement with significant health and safety risks. This is in line with employment law and is to ensure the health and safety of the mother following birth. Students following courses of professional training or receiving bursaries from professional bodies should check minimum or recommended absence periods with the professional bodies concerned.

- 9.7 If the university is concerned about a student's health in relation to her proposed return date or her course requirements, the student should be asked for their GP's or health worker's confirmation of their fitness to return to study.
- 9.8 Students should be allowed to take up to one year out of study. Where there is concern about her knowledge of the field of study being affected by the length of time that she takes, the student's institute should take steps to ensure she is kept up to speed with developments in the field. For example, she could be sent lists of key reading and new research, dates and transcripts of relevant lectures, and given access to key journals.
- 9.9 In exceptional circumstances, students may need to extend the length of maternity leave that they take beyond the standard time allowed, for example in cases of postnatal depression, serious illness or loss of a baby, or where there is no available childcare.
- 9.10 The university will take steps to enable students to complete the requirements of their course or module before they take maternity-related absence. Where a student is unable to complete her course or module before taking maternity-related absence she will, if possible, be allowed to complete the course or module on her return.
- 9.11 Students should decide when they start their maternity-related absence in agreement with the university. If students wish to, they may study up to their due date, or from starting their maternity-related absence a full term or semester before their due date, where practicable.
- 9.12 Where a student is close to her due date and unable to study as planned, the university may, in consultation with the student, start her maternity-related absence earlier than planned or, if appropriate, explore alternative methods through which she can meet the course requirements.
- 9.13 The date when a student intends to return from maternity-related absence should be discussed and agreed prior to commencing the period of absence. However, this date may change during the course of the absence, and students should notify Registry Services as soon as possible of any change in their expected return date.
- 9.14 Before a student returns from a period of maternity-related absence, consideration should be given to her requirements on return. The student's study options, and the continued support should be discussed with the student in developing her support plan and confirmed with the student prior to her return.
- 9.15 Students should be made aware of any options that exist to resume their course on a part-time or distance-learning basis. If a student requests to study part-time rather than full-time, the request should not be declined unless that can be justified, and the justification should be provided in writing by the head of academic institute concerned.
- 9.16 Discussions about the student's return to study should be held between the student, the Student Community Wellbeing Service Manager and the student's academic or personal tutor.

10. Financial support during and following pregnancy

A student's entitlement to benefits and other payments during and following pregnancy and the impact of the pregnancy and maternity-related absence on the student's funding from statutory and other sources can be complex so the student

should be referred to the university's Money Advisers in Student Services to discuss her particular situation. Initial contact can be arranged through **firstpoint** by the student emailing firstpoint@worc.ac.uk or telephoning 01905 542551.

11. Assessments and examinations

- 11.1 If a student is due to give birth near to, or during, assessment deadlines or the examination period, and wishes to complete her assessed work or sit her examinations, she should not be prevented from doing so.
- 11.2 In examinations, pregnant students may require rest breaks and may need to visit the toilet more frequently than those who are not pregnant. They may also require a more comfortable and supportive chair. Consequently, the student may need to sit the examination in a location separate from other students. The university will consider the types of standard adjustment they can make for pregnant students taking examinations, which can then be agreed with the student concerned.
- 11.3 If a student is concerned about sitting examinations or meeting assessed work deadlines, or if she has a pregnancy-related health condition that is exacerbated by stress, she should be advised to seek advice from her midwife or doctor. If the student's midwife or doctor advises against her sitting an examination or trying to meet the assessed work deadline, an alternative method of assessment should be explored.
- 11.4 If a student is unable to undertake an alternative method of assessment, or if she experiences significant pregnancy-related problems in the course of an examination or when undertaking assessed work, the university will make arrangements for her to submit an assessment item(s) or sit the examination at the next opportunity. If appropriate, submission of assessment item(s) or examinations should be considered as the student's first attempt.

12 Facilities for breast-feeding and rest

- 12.1 Room BB180 in Bredon building has been set aside as a rest room and breast-feeding facility. The room contains a bed, reclining chair and nappy changing facilities. The room is suitable for mothers wishing to express breast milk and a fridge and microwave are provided to store and re-heat milk and baby foods. The room can be accessed by any student using their student ID card.
- 12.2 In addition to BB180 breast feeding can take place anywhere on campus. Highchairs are provided in the refectory for small children eating there.
- 12.3 Some students may want to breast feed in public places, particularly if these are areas within or close to buildings and services they use frequently. The Equality Act 2010 gives explicit protection to women who breast feed in public places. The university is aware that tensions could arise if other students feel uncomfortable, for example for religious reasons, when women breast feed in public. Where this occurs, the needs of breast-feeding women take precedence.

13. International students and those on placement or studying abroad

- 13.1 Unless they are advised not to do so by their doctor or midwife, students should be able to travel during pregnancy. However, there are some considerations.
- Airlines have different policies and may not allow travel beyond 36 weeks or, in the event that the pregnancy is complicated or multiple, beyond 32 weeks. Students will need to check individual airline policies before travelling and be aware that airlines will ask students for proof that it is safe for them to travel.
 - UK students who are on placement or studying abroad will need to check their visa terms and conditions as they may need to extend their stay or return to the country at a later date.
 - As pregnancy is considered a pre-existing condition by insurance companies, students who are pregnant prior to commencing a field trip or their placement or study abroad will need to check whether their insurance covers them for pre-existing conditions.
- 13.2 If an international student becomes pregnant during their studies, she should be referred to the International Student Adviser, Deb Graddon. The adviser will be able to look at their individual Visa requirements and support them appropriately. To make an appointment, please contact Deb Graddon either by telephone on 01905 542743 or by email d.graddon@worc.ac.uk.
- 13.3 If a student is studying or on a placement abroad during her pregnancy or maternity, the university will liaise with the host institution or placement provider to ensure, where possible, that her needs are met.

14. Student accommodation

- 14.1 Students in University managed accommodation will not be asked to leave because they are pregnant and will be supported in finding suitable accommodation prior to the arrival of their baby or prior to their return from maternity-related absence, whatever is most appropriate for the student.
- 14.2 Given the demand for student accommodation, students should be advised to consider their accommodation requirements in the early stages of pregnancy.
- 14.3 Contracts for university owned and managed accommodation will allow students to end their contract early because of pregnancy or maternity without penalty. Where a student is in private accommodation, the university will, where possible, provide support and advice on terminating their contract.

15. Use of university services and facilities

- 15.1 During the COVID-19 pandemic, campuses are restricted to essential visitors only. Unfortunately, this means that we are unable to welcome babies or children onto campus, except for those attending our Nursery. Students may take babies or children into the Hive, taking account of their COVID-safety measures, and ensuring that they are supervised at all times.
- 15.2 Students should discuss with their tutors or Course Leader if they would like to leave lectures/seminars in order to breastfeed their babies. The University will support breastfeeding mothers and ensure that arrangements are in place for you to feed your baby safely while continuing with your studies.

16. Paternity

- 16.1 The university will allow students who are partners of new mothers to take paternity-related absence; this will include those in a same sex relationship.
- 16.2 The university will be flexible in allowing a student to attend their partner's antenatal appointments. In addition, a student may need to take time off if their partner has complications with her pregnancy or a serious pregnancy-related illness.
- 16.3 If a student wants to take paternity-related absence, they should initially inform Registry Services and their academic or personal tutor of their partner's pregnancy at least 15 weeks before the baby is due. Early notification is encouraged as partners may need to attend antenatal appointments.
- 16.4 The university will allow students paternity-related absence in line with entitlements that exist in employment law for paternity leave.
- 16.5 The university will ensure students on paternity-related absence are able to access materials from seminars and lectures missed. If students want to take extended paternity-related absence consideration will need to be given to the support provided to the student, and it may be appropriate to develop a student support plan as described in 8 above and in line with the plan recommended in annexe A.
- 16.6 If a student chooses to sit an examination while their partner is in labour or during their paternity-related absence, they should be made aware of the universities exceptional mitigating circumstances policy. If a student is unable to sit an examination or submit coursework on time because of their partner's pregnancy or labour, they should be allowed to resit the examination at the earliest possible opportunity or should be given an extension. Such arrangements may also be appropriate if the student's partner has a serious pregnancy-related illness.
- 16.7 In other compulsory elements of courses, such as field trips or work placements, the university can consider the feasibility of students undertaking them at an alternative time. Where this is not possible, justification should be provided in writing.

17. Adoption

- 17.1 Students who have been matched for adoption should inform their academic or personal tutor and the Student Community Wellbeing Service Manager (see 5 above). If the student is the primary adopter, a support plan should be developed in line with the guidance at 8 above. If the student's partner is the primary adopter, upon formal adoption of the child, the student should be allowed time off from studies in line with the advice in section 16 above.
- 17.2 Students who are adopting should consult the university's Money Advisers (see 10 above) about benefits and other support to which they may be entitled and for advice on any implications for financial support they may already be receiving.

18. Abortion or termination of pregnancy

- 18.1 A student may decide to have an abortion for many reasons – for example, because of personal circumstances, because of risks to their health, or because there is a high probability the baby will have a serious medical condition.

- 18.2 Students considering an abortion will be offered counselling by the NHS or, if attending one, a private abortion clinic. They will also be offered counselling following an abortion.
- 18.3 Students may need time off from study for tests before, and to recover after, an abortion. While this time should be treated in line with an institution's usual sickness absence policy, consideration should be given to the impact of an abortion on a student's ability to meet deadlines and sit examinations. If a student has an abortion for reasons relating to her health or the health of the baby, and if she becomes pregnant again, she is likely to require more tests and monitoring than women who have not had a problematic pregnancy.

19. Miscarriage, still births and neonatal death

- 19.1 The university needs to be mindful of the support a student may need if she miscarries or has a still birth, or if the baby dies shortly after it is born. Students should be encouraged to inform the university if this happens, and a meeting should be organised between the student and the Student Community Wellbeing Service Manager (see 5.1 above) to establish the support she is receiving from her healthcare provider and the support available from the university. If the student does not inform the university of her situation, it will be limited in the support it can provide, but if the student had already informed the university of her pregnancy it would not be inappropriate for the Student Community Wellbeing Service Manager to approach the student directly out of concern for her health.
- 19.2 If a student who has had a miscarriage, still birth or neonatal death becomes pregnant again, she is likely to require more tests and monitoring than other women.
- 19.3 Miscarriage is a common occurrence, and one in four pregnancies ends in miscarriage. Miscarriage is most likely to occur in the first three months of pregnancy. If a student miscarries, she is likely to need time off study for tests and to recover. Consideration should be given to the impact of a miscarriage on a student's ability to meet deadlines and sit examinations.
- 19.4 A student who has miscarried may wish to meet with one of the university's counsellors to discuss her situation. The counsellor will be able to provide support and advice on other sources of help the student may use.
- 19.5 Still births occur when a baby dies in the womb or is born dead after 24 weeks of pregnancy. Neonatal deaths occur shortly following birth. According to the still birth and neonatal death charity SANDS, up to 17 babies are stillborn or die shortly after birth every day in the UK.
- 19.6 A student who has a still birth or whose baby dies shortly after birth should be entitled to the same length of maternity-related absence and financial and wellbeing support as a student whose baby is not stillborn.

20. Childcare on campus

The university has an Ofsted approved nursery and early years education centre on campus, Unitots, located on the St. John's site in Bredon building. The nursery takes children aged from 3 months to 5 years of age. Places are limited and are allocated on a first come first served basis. Parents are advised to make contact with Hazel Rutherford, the Nursery Manager as soon as possible to apply for a

place. Enquiries and applications can be made before the baby is born. Enquiries can be sent to unitots@worc.ac.uk, tel. 01905 855277

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Updated October 2020 by Lucy Sandwell

Annexe A: Sample support form

Student Details	
Name	
Student Number	
Email address	
Telephone number	
International student:	Yes/No

Course Details	
Course title	
Year of study	
Personal Academic Tutor	
Course Leader	

Key Dates	
What is the student's due date?	
How many weeks pregnant was the student when she notified HEI of pregnancy?	

Informing other staff		
	Name	Date

Course Leader		
Personal Academic Tutor		
Student Records		
Placement Coordinator		
Placement provider		
Other:		

Accommodation	
Is the student living in University managed accommodation?	Yes/No
Action required:	

Health and Safety assessment	
Has a risk assessment for the student's course been completed?	Yes/No
Where changes are required to alleviate or minimise risk, who is responsible for ensuring they are implemented?	
Have you discussed any pregnancy related illness that may affect the student's ability to undertake their course?	
Actions required:	

Course Requirements		
	Yes/No	Health and safety assessment completed
Course placement		

Field trips		
Examinations		

If the student has to complete a placement:	
Has the placement provider been notified?	Yes/No
Will the student be able to complete her placement?	Yes/No
If no, what alternative arrangements have been made?	

Pregnancy-related absence	
If the dates or times of antenatal appointments affect the student's study, are they aware who to discuss this with?	

Services and facilities	
Has the student been informed about:	Yes/No
• Rest facilities on campus	
• Money Advise	
• Programme Advisers	
• Counselling and Mental Health	
• Unitots Nursery	
• International Adviser	
• Mitigating circumstances policy in the event that pregnancy/maternity affects examinations and assessments	

Assessments and Examinations	
Does the student have any assessments or	Yes/No

examinations around the time of her due date?	Details:
Are there any assessments that the student is unable to complete due to her pregnancy or maternity?	Yes/No Details:
What alternative arrangements have been made for any outstanding or incomplete assessments?	

Maternity-related absence	
How much maternity-related absence does the student intend on taking?	
Expected start date:	
Expected return to study date:	
Will the temporary leave of absence affect the student's ability to complete any module requirements?	Yes/No Details:
Has a temporary leave of absence been completed?	Yes/No

Privacy Notice
<p>Student Support and Wellbeing are requesting this information from you in order to support you as a student. We may also use the data to monitor and evaluate trends and uses of our service. We will record that you are pregnant and your expected due date on your central student record that is managed and controlled by Student Records. Risk assessments are submitted to your Course Leader for monitoring purposes and implementing control measures as required.</p> <p>Please note that the University of Worcester is the Data Controller and details of how we process your data including how long we retain it and your rights are detailed on www.worcester.ac.uk/informationassurance/student-privacy-notice.html. The processing of this data is dependent upon your explicit consent (Article 6(1)(a) and Article 9(2)(a) GDPR).</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I consent to my personal information being processed in accordance with the purpose identified above.</p>

Signatures	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed by staff member: 	
Name	
Title	
Signature	
Date	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed by student: 	
Name	
Signature	
Date	