

Guidance on Student Pregnancy and Maternity

M-1 Guidance on Student Pregnancy and Maternity

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1.0 Scope

This document provides both students and staff with information about the support that the University of Sunderland (at either its Sunderland or London campuses) can offer to a student (or where relevant, her partner) who

- thinks she may be pregnant
- has recently given birth
- has recently experienced stillbirth or miscarriage
- has terminated a pregnancy

It also provides some information relating to supporting a student regardless of gender who has recently become a parent (including through adoption) or is the partner of someone who has a very young child (defined as children who are under the age of six months, or who are breastfeeding). Where appropriate and/or relevant, references below to the mother may also be taken as referring to the partner.

2.0 Guiding principles

The University believes that any of the above should not hinder a student successfully completing a programme of study. The University is committed to being as flexible as possible, whilst ensuring that any accommodations made for the student do not compromise academic standards, or the University's duties and obligations in respect of health and safety or the safeguarding of children.

This policy is based on a set of important guiding principles, namely:

- The guiding principle is to endeavour to support the student through her programme wherever practicable, and reasonable adjustments should be made to facilitate this.
- **Avoiding less favourable treatment.** Staff shall make sure they avoid where practicable treating a student less favourably than other students where that student falls into the scope of this document.
- **Taking a flexible approach.** The University recognises its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and its staff will take a flexible approach to ensuring a pregnant student has access to a safe environment which facilitates their learning. The University fully support and enable students to engage with their studies and make reasonable adjustments where necessary. The degree of flexibility that can be offered will vary depending upon the student's programme of study and the level of risk involved, balanced against the University's other obligations such as health and safety.
- **Demonstrating a non-judgmental and sensitive approach.** Staff will take a non-judgmental and unbiased approach when dealing with students to whom this policy applies. Information will be treated as confidential, but may be shared on a need to know basis, if written consent has been obtained from the student to do so. In certain circumstances for the safety and welfare of the individual or others it may be necessary to share information on a need to know basis.

- **Enabling informed choices.** Members of staff will not attempt to direct or unduly influence a student in their decision making. They will accept that their role is to signpost appropriately which will enable the student to make appropriate decisions (except in cases where a decision on risk assessment is made by the University).
- In accordance with the University's Safeguarding Policy, and to avoid disruption to others, students should not bring their children on to the University campus, and are expected to make relevant childcare arrangements when they are expected to be at the University.

3.0 Support and Guidance

- 3.1 The University's Wellbeing service is able to coordinate a range of support for pregnant students and their families. Pregnant students and new mothers will need guidance and services from a variety of internal and external to the University so external to the University so effective coordination of this and the development of student support plan is vital. Student finance can be effected by pregnancy and maternity leave so all students are encouraged to seek guidance from the Student Financial Service.

Your wellbeing as a pregnant student, new mother or partner of a new mother is of paramount importance. Confidential wellbeing support is available from the Student Wellbeing Team who can be contacted on wellbeing@sunderland.ac.uk or by telephone 0191 5152933. The team will ensure the student has thought about all of their support needs including their mental and physical health, childcare arrangements, living and socialising changes, and the university's approach to breastfeeding and milk expression/storage. International students have particular need relating to their visas and support for international student is available from an International Adviser at either Campus. The International or wellbeing adviser can also offer guidance in respect of UK norms around the care and protection of Children.

For London – Contact Health and Wellbeing Team Face to Face meeting (drop-in or booked appointments) phone 0207 5317343 Wellbeing email: londonhealth@sunderland.ac.uk

The University's Sunderland Campus Childcare service can be contacted on (0191) 5152286. We do not have this service at London Campus.

- 3.2 If a student is resident in student accommodation, she should have an early discussion with the University's Residential Services team about accommodation options. The University has limited access to family accommodation and so external / private rented accommodation may need to be arranged by the student prior to the birth. The Wellbeing Team can offer support and guidance in helping find suitable alternative accommodation.
- 3.3 Although the wellbeing team can offer support to pregnant students, this does not include the sourcing of cots, bedding or baby clothing in preparation for the birth. This is the responsibility of the individual student and her family. However, wellbeing can refer to community-based support available for all residents of Sunderland. All pregnant students experiencing financial hardship should make an application to the University's Student Support Fund (formerly University Hardship Fund). Additional information and to download

an application form can be found here: [Student Support Fund | The University of Sunderland](#).

- 3.4 Students who are to become parents through adoption should inform their Faculty (or in the case of students at the London Campus, the Campus team) as soon as possible, so that discussion can take place, and an Academic Support Plan can be agreed as above.

4.0 Notification

Students are not under any obligation to inform the University if they (or their partner) are in one of the categories indicated in the scope of this document. However, students are encouraged to disclose to the University at the earliest possible opportunity. If a student chooses not to disclose, she should do so knowing that the University cannot undertake the risk assessment and wellbeing support arrangements outlined below. Late disclosure may mean that alternative arrangements for study and/or assessment may not be possible if needed.

In deciding whether or not to inform the University students are encouraged to consider that there may be elements of a programme of study that could present a health and safety risk to a pregnant student or the unborn child, and a risk assessment can *only* be undertaken if there is awareness of a pregnancy. If a student's pregnancy-related absence (for example, for antenatal appointments) impacts significantly on the student's studies, the University will only be able to take proper account of the reasons for absence if they are notified of these. Sometimes, the absence of a student can adversely affect the work of other students she is working alongside (for example, on a group project). It is important to notify the Programme Leader (London: Programme Manager; research students: Director of Studies) so that plans can be made to deal with any issues arising from such an absence.

5.0 Risk Assessment

- 5.1 As soon as a student makes a disclosure a risk assessment, or series of risk assessments, will be undertaken by appropriate staff in the Faculty (for the University's London Campus, by the Health and Wellbeing Manager in conjunction with the Programme Manager) to ensure that there are no elements of the programme of study that present a risk to the health and safety of the student or the unborn child. This may include, for example, risks associated with physical activity such as lifting or carrying, or the use in laboratory work of chemicals or micro-organisms.

The process of undertaking a risk assessment can be supported and guided through use of the checklist in Appendix 2. A risk assessment template is available to be downloaded from the risk assessment portal that can be amended as necessary for individual student circumstances. This will include consideration of welfare needs and support to the student.

- 5.2 Any such risk assessment should include any placement or off-site activity that the student may engage in. Where a student may be on placement, the respective roles and responsibilities between provider and student should be clearly agreed and detailed as part of the assessment. Where a student makes a disclosure, the information will be shared with the provider on a confidential basis in order that the provider can carry out any risk

assessments required by its own internal policies. Such risk assessments may also include specific assessments under regulations such as the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations and the Manual Handling Operations Regulations. Any resulting risk assessments will be shared with the student.

- 5.3 Faculties will determine the appropriate staff to make a professional judgement as to the assessment of risk. The lead in assessing risk will normally be the Programme Leader (Programme Manager at London Campus) or Director of Studies, but they may also consult other academic staff or technical staff with key expertise, the University's Occupational Health Service or any other appropriate body for relevant advice. Although the student will be consulted in the process of the decision on risk, the judgement is not open to appeal. This does not remove the student's rights under UK law or the University's Student Complaints Procedure.
- 5.4 The outcome of a risk assessment should seek to eliminate risk or to control it to an acceptable level. If the risk cannot be avoided by other means, alternative arrangements should be offered where practicable. The assessment should build in appropriate review points where necessary.
- 5.5 The outcomes of risk assessments will be stored as confidential data and should be disposed of securely after year of graduation/withdrawal plus one year.

6.0 Academic Support Plan

- 6.1 To accompany the risk assessment an Academic Support Plan should be developed by the Programme Leader/Programme Manager/Director of Studies, in conjunction with the student, to enable her to continue study, or to make appropriate alternative arrangements, or to plan any necessary leave of absence.
- 6.2 Students on professional programmes may have to meet certain specific requirements or demonstrate specific competencies set out by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies. These requirements may mean that adjustments cannot be made (for example, to a competency standard). In these cases the student may need to take a leave of absence.
- 6.3 If the Support Plan means that a student is continuing with her studies, she should meet regularly with her Programme Leader/Programme Manager, Director of Studies or nominee to assess the effectiveness of any specific arrangements put in place, or the need for any further adjustments.
- 6.4 Students are encouraged to consider that the earlier disclosure is made, the more effective the process of planning an Academic Support Plan might be. Late disclosure may mean that some adjustments that might have been possible are now not.

7.0 Attendance and leave of absence

- 7.1 Other than short term absences of the kind that might be taken with (for example) minor illness, students who are engaging with study are expected to meet the University's attendance requirements. If attendance requirements cannot be met then the student should take a leave of absence. If a student does not take leave of absence, but also does not attend over a period of time, then the University's policy on non-attendance will have to

apply. The student must consider whether her circumstances will allow her to engage with study with appropriate attendance: if they do not, then a leave of absence should be taken.

- 7.2 Students should not return to study within two weeks after giving birth, in alignment with the statutory restriction of the same duration for women in employment. This period will not be considered as an absence by the University in its recording of student attendance.
- 7.3 If the University is concerned whether a student is fit to return to the University, she may be required to provide medical evidence to confirm fitness.
- 7.4 The standard University Leave of Absence policy applies, with the following exception: the normal test that a student is required to be of 'good academic standing' to be granted a leave of absence does not apply. Provided that a student conforms to the maximum period of registration of their programme, as set out in the academic regulations, and the general requirements of the Leave of Absence Policy, a leave of absence for maternity would not prevent a later leave of absence for any other reason.
- 7.5 Programme Leaders (Programme Managers for London) should routinely refer any student taking a Leave of Absence to the University's Student Financial Advice Service (Engagement Team for London), but it is particularly important that students covered by this policy are signposted to this.
- 7.6 Any student whose partner is pregnant and who will be responsible with the mother for raising the child is entitled to request time out of study. This may be for medical appointments before or after the birth, or for a leave of absence following the birth. Any student in this position should consult his or her Programme Leader/Programme Manager as soon as possible to discuss this. Agreements to absence are subject to the same provisos as indicated in the Academic Support Plan section.

8.0 Extenuating circumstances

- 8.1 Pregnancy is not in itself an extenuating circumstance. However, complications arising from a pregnancy may be considered as extenuating circumstances which would require additional support beyond that laid out in the Support Plan, and would be considered on an individual basis as with any other extenuating circumstances claim. The standard University policy on Extenuating Circumstances applies, including the principle of 'fit to sit': if a student engages with an assessment, she has deemed herself fit and cannot then make a retrospective extenuating circumstances claim. If a student is not fit to engage with an assessment, then an extenuating circumstances application should be submitted in advance.
- 8.2 The two week period following birth, although it does not meet the standard test in the University's extenuating circumstances policy, *does* exceptionally count as an event which would be grounds for extenuating circumstances to be automatically granted-for example, to have assessments within those two weeks to be deferred until the next assessment point.
- 8.3 Other short term absences as referred to in the Attendance section above would not normally be considered as grounds for extenuating circumstances, although may provide grounds for a student to apply for an extension as defined in the Extenuating Circumstances Policy.

8.4 The student must consider whether her circumstances will allow her to study effectively and to engage with assessments: if they do not, then a leave of absence should be taken.

8.5 The partner of a student who is pregnant would not be eligible to use the pregnancy as extenuating circumstances. The immediate period including and following the birth (up to a maximum of one week) would provide valid reason for a claim, and where complications arise in any of the events covered by the scope of this document, this should be treated as would any extenuating circumstances claim based on illness of a partner with ordinary circumstances.

9.0 International applicants and students

9.1 If a student is in the UK on a Student visa, taking leave as a result of a pregnancy may impact on the United Kingdom Visa and Immigration (UKVI) Home Office immigration rules. Therefore it is vital, and the student's responsibility, to seek advice from the Senior International Student Adviser (Sunderland)/Gateway International Adviser (London) as early as possible in the pregnancy, to ensure that any arrangements which are made are UKVI compliant. Students and applicants should be aware that they may be charged for health care costs by the National Health Service. Please see advice from the Senior International Student Adviser (Sunderland)/Gateway International Adviser (London) for further information.

9.2 An International student may request an authorised leave of absence. The Faculty (or for students at London Campus, the Student Administration Team) will decide if such a leave of absence will be agreed, with reference to the University Leave of Absence policy. If a leave of absence is authorised for more than four academic weeks the student will be required to return overseas. The student will be advised of this when the leave of absence is authorised. Students are reminded that many airlines will not carry passengers who are more than seven months pregnant, and should take this into account in their planning. Delaying travel will not impact upon the University's duty to report any break in study.

9.3 If an international applicant discloses that she is pregnant prior to registration, she should be signposted to the Senior International Student Adviser at Sunderland campus or International Student Adviser at London campus. Advice and support will be offered to the applicant and the content of the discussion will include the following;

- Clarifying the University regulations regarding leave of absence in the first semester.
- Clarifying the visa implications when taking a deferral from studies
- Consideration given to deferral of studies depending on the advancement of pregnancy and the impact the pregnancy and birth will have on their ability to continue with their studies without a break.
- The University attendance monitoring system
- Offering practical and emotional support from the University Wellbeing team

9.4 If the applicant chooses to register on to her programme of study following a full discussion she should not be prevented from doing so for reasons of pregnancy.

10.0 Rest Facilities for Pregnant Students and Breast Feeding Students

- 10.1 Rest facilities are defined as designated rooms on campus in which expected mothers can rest or new mothers utilize the room to express breast milk available to both staff and students. It is important that the rooms are not utilized to deliver first aid due to the risk of cross contamination.

The oversight of use and maintenance of the facilities is led by Estates & Facilities Services.

- 10.2 Maternity Rest Rooms are available on both our main campus's in Sunderland;

Edinburgh 2nd Floor EB121 Bookings to go via the wellbeing inbox– wellbeing@sunderland.ac.uk

Reg Vardy Building St Peter's Campus Room 406 Bookings for this go via the estatesandfacilities.helpdesk@sunderland.ac.uk

London Campus Maternity Rest Room is located on the 3rd Floor of the Marsh Wall Building.
No Booking is required

11.0 Associated Documents

Extenuating Circumstances Policy

<https://services.sunderland.ac.uk/academicregistry/academicqualityhandbook/programmeregulationandassessment/#ext-circs>

Student Handbook

<https://services.sunderland.ac.uk/academicregistry/studenthandbook/>

Leave of Absence Policy

<https://services.sunderland.ac.uk/academicregistry/academicqualityhandbook/programmeregulationandassessment/#loab>

Appendix 1: Guidance for Students

I think I may be pregnant what should I do?

If you have recently missed a period or think you could be pregnant, you should visit your GP as soon as possible. If you have used a home pregnancy kit, the GP will not generally repeat the test.

How will I manage my studies during my pregnancy?

When your pregnancy is confirmed you should make an appointment with the Wellbeing Adviser who can support you in liaising with your Programme Leader or Manager to discuss the best way to progress your academic studies whilst pregnant.

What might the financial implications be for me?

You should make an appointment with the University's Student Financial Advice Service to discuss this. This can include the implications of taking time out of study, and the possibilities for claiming Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, and other grants/benefits to which you may be entitled as a parent.

I am not sure if I wish to continue with the pregnancy, who can I discuss this with?

The University is committed to making sure that unbiased advice and/or signposting is available for women in this situation and students should feel confident to approach any member of the staff team for assistance. Specialised and confidential advice can be sought from the University's Health Wellbeing Adviser. Advice can also be obtained via your local GP, Sexual Health Service or Family Planning Association. www.maristopes.org is a useful online source of information.

I have recently had a miscarriage or a stillbirth

The Wellbeing Team is available for students who have recently had a miscarriage or stillbirth. She can provide support, and liaise with academic and student support staff with regards to return to study if, and when, a student is able to do so. Sands are a national charity that can provide support www.uk-sands.org

I am an international student studying in the UK, and my partner is pregnant - can I take time off?

Any student whose partner is pregnant or who has recently become a parent (both of which includes students in same-sex relationships), is advised to speak with the Gateway to seek approval for a short period of absence. A formal leave of absence is unlikely to be approved for this reason for international students and students on Student visas would be required to withdraw and return home if they took an extended period of leave of absence.

Appendix 2

Pregnancy/maternity Support: Risk Assessment Checklist and link to Risk Assessment template

Student Details		
Name:	Course:	
Address:	Year of Course:	
Tel:	Faculty:	
Email:	Programme Leader/Programme Manager /director of studies:	
Next of Kin:	Due Date:	
Notifications		
Date of Notification to University:	List of staff that the student would like informed (and dates of when the student would like them to be informed)	
Risk Assessment (copy to be attached where relevant)		
Has an assessment been completed, in respect (where relevant) to:	<i>Indicate whether yes, no or not applicable</i>	Action Required
Course – lectures, seminars etc?		
Course – practical and lab work?		
Assessments?		
Field trips/Conferences, any form of student off site?		
Placements?		
Study Abroad?		
Other (please complete)		
Does that assessment specify who is responsible for any actions?		
Absence - Antenatal		

<p>Will antenatal appointments affect the student's study?</p> <p>Is there any pregnancy related illness which would impact on the student's ability to study?</p>		
Absence - Postnatal		
<p>When does the student intend for this to start?</p> <p>When does the student intend to return?</p> <p>Will this period affect the student's study, and if so how?</p> <p>If yes, what remedies have been agreed and what support will be provided to the student on her return?</p> <p>Does this period require a formal leave of absence, and if so has the student been directed to the procedure so that she can apply?</p>		
Support		
<p>Has the student been referred to the Student Financial Advice Service?</p> <p>Has the student been referred to Wellbeing?</p> <p>Has the student been informed of the Childcare provision on the Sunderland campus if applicable?</p> <p>If the student is an international student, has the student seen the International Student Advisor?</p> <p>Has the student been advised to consult the Accommodation Service if needed?</p>	<p>Things to cover with Wellbeing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Socialising Mental health and emotional support Childhood beyond campus – UK norms and expectations (intl students) Health and wellbeing Funding and finances Referrals and signposting (NHS/community support services) Accommodation Breastfeeding/expressing facilities. Maternity Grants 	

Both student and relevant staff member to print name, sign and date each time plan reviewed, and to agree date for next review:

Student name (Print)

Student signature

Relevant staff member's name (print)

Relevant staff member's signature

Agreed date for next review:

Student Pregnancy and Maternity Risk Assessment template –

This risk assessment is not required to be uploaded onto the portal as it is for local information only and should be amended accordingly for individual circumstances.

The risk assessment may need be reviewed regularly as pregnancy progresses.

To request a copy of the Risk assessment template follow the link below

[Student Pregnancy and Maternity Risk Assessment \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

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This Policy can be obtained from the [Human Resources website](#), [Docushare](#) or by contacting [Human Resources](#).

If you would like this Policy in larger print please contact Human Resources.