Pregnancy, Maternity and Paternity: Guidance for Students

1. Introduction
The University is committed to supporting you appropriately through pregnancy and maternity, although the level of support that can be provided will very much depend on the nature and structure of your programme of study, as well as your individual circumstances. This guidance has been produced to inform you of the steps that you should take should you fall pregnant during the course of your studies, as well as indicating the support that you can expect from staff in your school. It also includes guidance for students on issues connected to paternity.

2. If you become pregnant
Although you are under no obligation to inform your school/faculty if you become pregnant during the course of your studies, your school/faculty will be unable to provide you with specific support unless it knows about your situation. You are therefore strongly encouraged to disclose your pregnancy at the earliest opportunity to ensure that any necessary health and safety and/or other support measures can be put into place. Applicants who are pregnant must inform their school prior to commencing their programme.

You should also arrange an appointment with your GP, Students’ Health Service, or a midwife as soon as possible. Whilst only you can make the decision as to whether or not to continue with your pregnancy, there are services available at the University that can offer confidential support such as the Just Ask Student Adviser, the Vice-President Welfare and Equality at the Students’ Union, or the Student Counselling Service.

If your pregnancy does not proceed to term (for example, because of a miscarriage or termination), results in stillbirth, or has any complicating factors, please inform your school/faculty so that consideration can be given to your ability to complete assessments and attend teaching. If you believe that your performance in an assessment has been affected by such matters, you might consider submitting extenuating circumstances. The Just Ask Advisers at the Students’ Union can help you with this process. You may also want to contact the Student Counselling Service to process the emotional impact of your loss.

2.1 Your health and safety
Once you have disclosed your pregnancy to your school an assessment will be undertaken to identify any health and safety risks to you and/or your child. This is particularly relevant if you are undertaking a programme that involves potentially high risks - for example, laboratory-based programmes or those involving contact with animals. Any placements, fieldwork, study abroad and any clinical work that your programme requires may also require a risk assessment. The outcome of the risk assessment and any practical implications can then be taken into account when making decisions around how you can be supported in your studies.
In some instances, you may also be referred to the University Occupational Health Service for further detailed advice on how the pregnancy may impact on your ability to meet the requirements of your programme.

2.2 International students
If you are an international student and require a visa to remain in the UK during your period of study, you must inform your Faculty Office of your pregnancy immediately so that appropriate advice can be sought from the International Student Visa Advice and Compliance team.

You may be required to suspend studies. If the suspension period is longer than two months, your visa may be cancelled and you will have to apply for a new visa to return to the UK. You can also seek advice from an International Student Adviser.

In all cases, international students must maintain contact with the International Student Visa Advice and Compliance team throughout your pregnancy and after the birth of your child in order to ensure that the conditions of your visa are not breached. Failure to do this may have serious implications on the status of the University as a highly trusted sponsor of international students under the immigration rules.

2.3 Postgraduate research students
If you are in receipt of a University or Faculty Scholarship or funding from a research council or other external body you should refer to the terms and conditions relating to your award. You should be aware that all research councils recently introduced harmonised maternity leave and pay entitlements for students funded from training grants. Students funded from training grants are entitled to take six months’ maternity leave on full stipend and a further six months’ unpaid maternity leave. In such cases you should work with your supervisor to identify any support that may be available from the funding body and to confirm the details of any associated terms and conditions.

2.4 Professional programmes
If you are undertaking a professional programme – such as medicine or veterinary studies – you may have to meet specific requirements related to the need to demonstrate certain knowledge, skills and competencies required by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies that cannot be compromised. These requirements will be taken into account when decisions are made regarding your school’s ability to accommodate your pregnancy and any associated maternity-related absence.

2.5 Confidentiality
Information concerning your pregnancy should be treated sensitively and should only be passed on with your consent, unless strictly necessary and on a need-to-know basis. For example, where an international student discloses a pregnancy it will be necessary to inform the International Student Visa Advice and Compliance team due to potential visa implications. Your school should agree who should be informed about your pregnancy with you in order for you to be supported as much as possible.
3. During pregnancy
Your school should arrange for you to have an identified point of contact who can work with you to plan ways in which your pregnancy and any subsequent period of maternity-related absence can be accommodated as well as maintain an overview of any impact that the pregnancy may be having on your academic progress.

At all times you are encouraged to make use of the University’s existing sources of support and advice, including the Student Counselling Service, the Students’ Union, and the Students’ Health Service. You may also wish to make contact with the University Day Nursery.

3.1 Time to attend healthcare appointments
Reasonable time off study will be permitted to enable you to keep appointments for antenatal care prescribed by your doctor, midwife or health visitor. You should provide your school with evidence of these appointments and they should be accommodated with appropriate measures in place to enable you to catch up on any taught components of your programme.

3.2 Pregnancy-related absence
Consideration will have to be given to the potential impact of any pregnancy-related absence on your academic progress. You are expected to make every effort to catch up with any missed taught components of your programme – for example, referring to lecture notes that are available on Blackboard or appropriate reading materials to cover the subject matter. Your school can advise on this where necessary. You will be expected to use the usual mechanisms for reporting sickness absence to report absence that is due to pregnancy-related sickness. If your pregnancy is affecting your ability to fully engage with your programme you must inform your school at the earliest opportunity.

3.3 Placements, field trips and study abroad
If you are due to complete any placements, fieldwork or study abroad your school will need to confirm with all relevant companies, such as airlines and insurance companies, that any travel is able to go ahead as planned, as well as undertaking a health and safety risk assessment on the activity where necessary. You may be required to provide a fitness to travel declaration from your GP. In some cases you may not be able to complete that particular component of your programme as planned, so alternatives will have to be explored. If medical evidence indicates that you are unable to participate and there is no appropriate alternative, then you may need to suspend your studies.

3.4 Examinations and assessments
Where alternative examination arrangements are required due to your pregnancy, you should apply for these in the usual way according to your school’s procedure around this. In situations where your pregnancy or maternity may have an impact on your ability to complete examinations or other assessments in the usual way, your school should consider alternative methods of assessment that will test the same learning outcomes.

For example, if you are unable to undertake/complete an examination or complete assessed work for pregnancy-related reasons, you should immediately inform your school so that consideration can be given to allowing you to sit the examination, as a first attempt, at the earliest possible opportunity. Similarly, the school may arrange for an extension to the
deadline for the submission of coursework where your ability to meet this has been compromised by your pregnancy or maternity.

In such cases, you may wish to refer to the University’s Regulations and Code of Practice for Taught Programmes.

3.5 Facilities
While you are pregnant, breastfeeding and/or expressing breastmilk you may need access to private and hygienic facilities. The University has made available dedicated quiet rooms for this purpose in some buildings for students and staff who need to use them. For information on existing facilities and to arrange access to facilities in other buildings than your own department or make arrangements where provision doesn’t currently exist please discuss this with your School Manager or identified contact.

4. Maternity-related absence
You are strongly recommended to request a period of maternity-related absence following the birth of your child, although there is no legal requirement for you to do so. You should inform your school at the earliest opportunity of your intentions relating to maternity-related absence – this may be short-term or may involve a longer-term suspension of studies, taking into account the nature and structure of your programme of study. Although there is no legal minimum, it is recommended that you take at least two weeks’ leave following the birth of your child. Any requests for maternity-related absence will be considered by your Faculty Education Director who will then write to you confirming the length of absence that has been agreed and any conditions that may be attached to your return to study, such as medical confirmation of your ability to meet the requirements of your programme.

Any requests for a maternity-related suspension should be made in accordance with current faculty procedure on suspension of studies. You should also contact the Student Funding Office to discuss any potential financial implications associated with the suspension.

In some cases, your school may insist that you take a suspension of studies, particularly in relation to some professional programmes or where there are particular risks associated with your health and safety risk. Where this is necessary, your faculty will set out the reasons for this decision to you in writing. When determining the length of such a suspension your faculty will take into account the structure of your programme and the timing of the absence.

You must inform your school immediately if you become unable to study earlier than the planned start date of your maternity-related absence. This will enable your school to determine the flexibility that may be granted to enable you to meet your course requirements.

You should agree any plans for maintaining contact with your school during the period of absence. For short-term absences, this may involve consideration of measures to enable you to catch up with any missed teaching – for example, making use of lecture notes that are available on Blackboard or advising you of appropriate reading materials to cover any missed subject matter.

5. Return to study
Irrespective of the length of the absence your school should take necessary steps to support you in your return to study. In some cases, your school may request medical confirmation of your fitness to return to study and your ability to meet the requirements of your programme. You should agree your return to study date with your school prior to commencing the period of maternity-related absence. You are responsible for informing your school of any intended change to the agreed date of return.
6. Paternity

Wherever practicable, reasonable time off study will be permitted to enable you to attend antenatal appointments prescribed by a doctor, midwife or health visitor with your partner. You should provide your school with evidence of these appointments and where possible steps will be taken to enable you to catch up with any missed teaching (for example, provision of any handouts).

If you need to take time off due to complications that your partner may experience during her pregnancy, usual procedures for reporting absence should be used. Similarly, you should inform your school at the earliest opportunity if your ability to fully engage with your programme is being compromised due to your partner’s pregnancy.

Your school should be informed if you are likely to be absent due to your partner giving birth, particularly where the due date conflicts with any scheduled assessments, so that staff can take appropriate steps to accommodate this absence wherever practicable so to do. For further guidance on the timing and conduct of assessment with respect to paternity you may wish to refer to the University’s Regulations and Code of Practice for Taught Programmes.

You should inform your school if you would like to request a period of paternity-related absence, which may be short-term or may involve a longer-term suspension of studies. Such requests will be considered by your Faculty Education Director, taking into account the nature and structure of your programme of study. Any requests for a paternity-related suspension will be considered in accordance with your current faculty procedure on suspension of studies. You are also encouraged to make contact with the Student Funding Office to discuss any potential financial implications associated with the suspension.

Any support offered to male students with pregnant partners will also be available to female students with pregnant partners.
International Student Visa Advice and Compliance team
The International Student Visa Advice and Compliance team provides a range of support to international students – including specific advice for students who may become pregnant during the course of their studies. [http://www.bristol.ac.uk/international/studentsupport/](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/international/studentsupport/)

Students Counselling Service
The Students’ Counselling Service offers a range of support to students. Becoming pregnant while you are student can place additional pressures on you. Whether the pregnancy is planned or unplanned and/or unwanted will greatly affect how you feel. The Student Counselling Service is happy to support you as you process the news, plan for the impact and where necessary make choices. [http://www.bristol.ac.uk/student-counselling/services-offered/](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/student-counselling/services-offered/)

Students Health Service
The Students’ Health Service offers a full NHS General Practice service for all students and their dependents within the practice area. The Service can provide non-judgmental advice on options available to any student who becomes pregnant - whether you require antenatal care or advice/discussion about termination – and will see you on the same day that you make contact, Monday to Friday. Student Health also has links with midwives for ongoing antenatal health care. [http://www.bristol.ac.uk/students-health/](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/students-health/)

Students’ Union
The Just Ask advice service offers free, confidential and non-judgmental advice to all students. Advisers can help students to navigate the University's policies and procedures, offer practical support through UBU's Student Parents' Network (find us on Facebook) and discuss your options with you in an informal and independent way. [http://www.ubu.org.uk/justask/advice/](http://www.ubu.org.uk/justask/advice/)

University Day Nursery
The Day Nursery is primarily for students and staff; students registered at the University have priority for places, although there is a long waiting list. [http://www.bristol.ac.uk/nursery/](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/nursery/)