Student Pregnancy, Maternity and Paternity: Guidance for Staff

1. Introduction
As a provider of education, the University values the diversity of its students and is committed to creating and sustaining an excellent teaching and learning experience where all students are encouraged to thrive academically. The Equality Act 2010 significantly increased the legal protections for students during pregnancy and maternity, therefore both students and applicants are protected in relation to:

- admissions
- the provision of education
- access to any benefit, facility or service
- disciplinary proceedings

Schools are expected to ensure that students are appropriately supported through pregnancy and maternity and that wherever practicable they are not unreasonably prevented from applying for, starting, succeeding in or completing a programme of study. The level of support that can be offered by the school will very much depend on the nature and structure of the programme of study, as well as the student’s individual circumstances.

2. Notification of pregnancy
There is no legal requirement for students to inform their school if they are pregnant or if they become pregnant whilst they are studying. However, students should be strongly encouraged to disclose pregnancy at the earliest opportunity to ensure that any necessary health and safety and/or other support measures can be put into place. It is advisable for schools to incorporate a statement to this effect in their student handbook and other appropriate guidance material for students as necessary.

Upon notification of a student pregnancy the school should encourage the student to arrange an appointment with her GP, Students’ Health Service, or a midwife, if she has not done so already. It may also be helpful for her to contact a Student Welfare Officer at the Students’ Union or the Student Counselling Service.

2.1 Health and safety
Following notification, it is advisable for the School to undertake a health and safety risk assessment. This is particularly relevant for programmes involving potentially high risks to the student and/or her child - for example, laboratory-based programmes or those involving contact with animals. Placements, fieldwork, study abroad and any clinical work 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 the pregnancy might be accommodated. The School’s Safety Advisor and the Health and Safety Office can provide
advice as necessary. The student can be referred by the School to the University Occupational Health Service if required for further detailed advice. Referrals to an Occupational Health Adviser do not incur any costs.

2.2 Other factors to consider
The status of the student may influence the support that can be provided by the school. Where an international applicant or student discloses a pregnancy the school must contact an International Student Adviser immediately so that any visa implications can be discussed. The school should also inform the Senior International Adviser straight away. Any decisions relating to an international student in these circumstances should not be made without the involvement of the International Office. Research council-funded students are entitled to maternity leave and pay. From 1 April 2010, all research councils 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 the school should work with the student to identify any support that may be available from the funding body and to confirm the details of any associated terms and conditions.

Students on professional programmes – such as medicine – 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. The school will have to take these into account when making any decisions around their ability to accommodate the student’s pregnancy or associated maternity-related absence.

If a student miscarries, terminates her pregnancy or has a still birth/neo natal death, she is likely to need time off to recover and/or receive further medical attention. Staff should give consideration to the impact of such events on a student's ability to complete assessments and attend teaching. If appropriate, staff should refer students to the University's extenuating circumstances procedures. The Student Union can also give advice in these situations.

2.3 Confidentiality
Information concerning a student’s pregnancy should be treated sensitively and should be passed on only with the student’s 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 Office due to potential visa implications. The school should discuss with the student who she would like to inform about her pregnancy, who may need to know in order for her to be supported as much as possible, and how this should be communicated.

Any concerns around breaching confidentiality in such circumstances should be discussed with the University’s Information Rights Officer who is based in the Secretary’s Office.

3. During pregnancy
It is strongly recommended that the student has an identified point of contact in the school who can work with her to plan ways in which her 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 her progress.

For international students it is essential that the International Office is kept informed throughout their pregnancy and after the birth of the child in order to ensure that the conditions of her 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.

At all times students should be encouraged to make use of the University’s existing sources of support and advice, including the Students’ Union and the Students’ Health Service, and be informed of the University Day Nursery.

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

3.2 Pregnancy-related absence
Consideration should be given to the potential impact of any pregnancy-related absence on the student’s academic progress. This should include the introduction of measures where possible to enable the student to catch up with any missed taught components of the programme – for example, directing the student to lecture notes that are available on Blackboard or informing the student of appropriate reading materials to cover the subject matter. The usual mechanisms for reporting sickness absence should be used to report absence that is due to pregnancy-related sickness. The student should be encouraged to ensure that the school is informed at the earliest opportunity if her ability to fully engage with her programme is being compromised due to her pregnancy.

3.3 Placements, field trips and study abroad
If a student is due to complete any placements, fieldwork or study abroad the 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 (see Section 2.1). The student may need to obtain a fitness to travel declaration from her GP and in some cases the student may not be able to complete that particular component of her programme as planned, so alternatives may have to be explored. If medical evidence indicates that the student is unable to participate and there is no appropriate alternative, then the student may need to suspend her studies. Advice can be sought from the Equality and Diversity Manager in these circumstances.

3.4 Examinations and assessments
In situations where the student’s pregnancy or maternity may have an impact on her ability to complete examinations or other assessments the school should consider alternative methods of assessment that will test the same learning outcomes. Where alternative examination arrangements are required the student will need to apply for these in the usual way.
If a pregnant student is unable to undertake/complete an examination or complete assessed work for pregnancy-related reasons, the school should make arrangements for her to sit the examination, as a first attempt, at the earliest possible opportunity or arrange for an extension to the deadline for the submission of coursework.

Further guidance on the timing and conduct of assessment with respect to pregnancy, maternity and paternity can be found in the University’s Regulations and Code of Practice for Taught Programmes.

3.5 Facilities
While pregnant, breastfeeding and/or expressing breastmilk students 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 Facilities Management.

4. Maternity-related absence
Students should be encouraged to take a period of maternity-related absence following the birth of a child, although there is no legal requirement for them to do so. Maternity-related absence may be short-term or may involve a longer-term suspension of studies, taking into account the nature and structure of the programme of study. Although there is no legal minimum it is recommended that schools encourage students to take at least two weeks’ leave following the birth. The Faculty Education Manager must be made aware of any requests for maternity-related absence. Such requests must be approved by the Faculty Education Director who will then write to the student confirming the length of absence that has been agreed. The Faculty Education Director will also advise the student at this point of any conditions attached to her return to study, such as medical confirmation of her ability to meet the requirements of the programme. The Equality and Diversity Manager can advise on individual cases as necessary.

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

The school cannot insist that a student suspends her studies but in some cases it may be the only option, for example, in relation to some professional programmes or based on the outcome of a health and safety risk assessment. In such cases the reasons must be legally justifiable and clearly communicated to the student in writing. The school should not automatically require students to suspend studies for a year, but should work with the student to establish a suitable return-to-study date taking into account the structure of the programme and the timing of the absence. Staff are able to seek advice on such matters from the University’s Equality and Diversity Manager as necessary.

If the student becomes unable to study earlier than the planned start date of maternity-related absence the school should be as flexible as possible in exploring alternative ways in
which she can meet her course requirements.

The school should discuss and agree with the student any plans for maintaining contact with her during the period of absence. This should be confirmed in writing to the student. For short-term absences, this may involve consideration of measures to enable the student to catch up with any missed teaching – for example, directing the student to lecture notes that are available on Blackboard or informing the student of appropriate reading materials to cover the subject matter.

5. Return to study
The date when a student intends to return from maternity-related absence should be discussed and agreed with the student prior to commencing the period of absence (see Section 4). The student is responsible for informing the school of any intended change to the agreed date of return. Irrespective of the length of the absence the student should be supported in her return to study. It is advisable for a member of staff from the school to arrange to meet with the student upon her return to welcome her back to study and address any support needs where possible.

If the school is concerned about a student’s health in relation to her proposed return date or her course requirements, it is acceptable to ask the student to obtain medical confirmation of her fitness to return to study and her ability to meet the requirements of the programme.

6. Paternity
A student whose partner is pregnant is protected by the Equality Act 2010 against discrimination by association on the grounds of sex. Any support offered to male students with pregnant partners should also be available to female students with pregnant partners.

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

The student may need to take time off if their partner has complications with her pregnancy or a serious pregnancy-related illness, under which circumstances the usual mechanisms for reporting absence should be used. The student should be encouraged to ensure that the school is informed at the earliest opportunity if their ability to fully engage with their programme is being compromised due to their partner’s pregnancy.

If a student is likely to be absent due to their partner giving birth, and where the due date conflicts with any scheduled assessments, staff should endeavour to offer flexibility wherever practicable so to do. Further guidance on the timing and conduct of assessment with respect to pregnancy, maternity and paternity can be found in the University’s Regulations and Code of Practice for Taught Programmes.

Students may wish to take paternity-related absence, which may be short-term or may involve a longer-term suspension of studies, taking into account the nature and structure of
the programme of study. The Faculty Education Manager must be made aware of any requests for paternity-related absence. In all cases the length of the absence and any associated conditions must be agreed by the Faculty Education Director, who will confirm this to the student in writing. Any requests for a paternity-related suspension should be dealt with in accordance with the current faculty procedure on suspension of studies. The student should also be referred to the Student Funding Office to discuss any potential financial implications associated with the suspension.
The following checklist indicates areas that schools should consider in supporting a student during pregnancy, following the birth, and on her return to study. Any support measures should be developed and agreed with the student.

- **Communication about the student’s pregnancy** – which members of staff will need to be informed about the student’s pregnancy, and does she also want fellow students to know? When is the student happy for members of staff and fellow students to be informed? Who will be responsible for informing members of staff and fellow students?

- **Communication with the student during pregnancy** – what information will need to be communicated to the student? What is her preferred method of communication, and who should she contact if she has any concerns or her circumstances change?

- **Health and safety** – has an individual risk assessment been conducted?

- **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, can any steps be taken to support the student in meeting 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, can any steps be taken to support the student in fulfilling 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 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 arrangements can be made, students could be asked to notify their HEI 15
weeks before the expected birth of their child as to when they would like their maternity-related absence to commence.

 ✓ **Communication with the student during maternity-related absence** – what information will need to be communicated to the student? What is her preferred method of communication during maternity-related absence, and when will she confirm her return date from maternity-related absence?

 ✓ **Return to study** – what information will need to be communicated to the student during her ‘return to study’ meeting? Is any additional support required due to caring responsibilities?
Equali ty Act 2010
For further information on the Equality Act and how it applies to pregnancy and maternity please see
https://www.bris.ac.uk/equalityanddiversity/act/protected/pregandmat

Students Health Service
The Students’ Health Service offers a full NHS General Practice service for all students and their dependents within the practice area.
http://www.bristol.ac.uk/students-health/

Students’ Union
The Just Ask advice service offers free, confidential and non-judgemental 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’s Facebook page and discuss their options in an informal and independent way.
http://www.ubu.org.uk/justask/advice/

Students Counselling Service
The Students’ Counselling Service offers a range of support to students.
http://www.bristol.ac.uk/student-counselling/services-offered/

Occupational Health Service
Referrals may be made to the University Occupational Health Service for detailed advice on any risks associated with a particular programme.
http://www.bristol.ac.uk/safety/health/

Risk Assessment for new and expectant mothers
This guidance gives an indication of the potential hazards associated with a variety of activities and actions that can be taken to control any risks.
http://www.bristol.ac.uk/safety/media/po/new-expect-mothers-po.pdf

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/