

Student Pregnancy and Parental Leave Policy

Introduction

1. Birkbeck, University of London (the College) values the diversity of its student community and is committed to providing an inclusive, supportive environment, in which all students and their families, regardless of background, can achieve their full potential and are welcomed.
2. The College is therefore committed to supporting all students who are or become pregnant, terminate a pregnancy, experience miscarriage, still birth or neo-natal death, or welcome new children to their families through pregnancy or adoption.
3. Pregnancy and maternity have been protected characteristics since the introduction of the [Equality Act, 2010](#). Section 17 of the Act expands the protection from discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy and maternity to individuals outside the workplace. In doing so, the Act specifically mentions the HE sector.
4. This policy has been drawn up in line with the Equality Act, 2010, and guidance set out by the [Equality Challenge Unit on 'Student Pregnancy and Maternity'](#).
5. The College is committed to ensuring that all students and applicants are treated fairly. It is also the commitment of the College to ensure the health and safety of its students and members of staff and particularly of any minors.

Guidance

6. For students who become pregnant during their studies, those who are pregnant when their studies begin, and those who have given birth within the previous 26 weeks.
 - a. Contacting the school/faculty- You have the right to inform the College whenever you feel comfortable to do so, however, we recommend that you inform your Personal Tutor as well as the Programme Director at your earliest opportunity, so that the College is in a better position to support you. If a student chooses not to disclose circumstances to the College, we will be unable to explore and implement appropriate and reasonable support arrangements.
 - b. Implications for your studies and study leave- We understand that each situation is different and that the amount of leave that an expectant or new parent may want or need to take varies. If during your pregnancy you find yourself struggling to meet a

deadline due to poor health or frequent hospital appointments, please refer to the [Mitigating Circumstances Guidance](#). If you would like to take a period of leave, please refer to the [Break in Study Policy](#). We recommend that you meet with the school and Personal Tutor to talk through their plans, whether or not you are intending to take a break, and to think together through the support that you may require. You will complete together the Study Plan/Schedule of Assessment form at Appendix 1 of this document.

- c. Parental Leave- The amount of parental leave that a student chooses to take after their baby is born will vary according to their personal circumstances. However, you will not be permitted to attend College for two weeks after the birth of your child. This two-week period of absence is in line with health and safety regulations, Employment Law and Department of Work and Pensions guidelines (April 2014) and needs to be planned for in the Study Plan/Schedule of Assessment form.
- d. Returning to study- In advance of any planned return to studies, we recommend that you contact your school and Personal Tutor to think about the support you might need to return to study. If you have a disability, an existing mental health condition or are struggling with your mental wellbeing, it is recommended that you contact [Wellbeing Services](#).

Still births and miscarriages

- 7. In the event of a student suffering a miscarriage, a still birth or neonatal death, they are encouraged to contact the [Counselling Service](#) for support during that difficult time. In this circumstance, students are encouraged to take leave. The length of the leave will depend on the needs of the student and should be discussed with the Personal Tutor.

New parents through adoption or other

- 8. Students who are due to become new parents through adoption or other, should inform their Personal Tutor as well as the Programme Director at their earliest opportunity. If relevant, a plan should be developed in line with the guidance in this document and they should complete the relevant sections of the Study Plan/Schedule of Assessment form.

For the Personal Tutor and Head of School

- 9. Contacting the Student- We recommend that the Head of School (or nominee) and Personal Tutor meets with the student as soon as they are made aware of the pregnancy, to discuss the implications for their studies and agree specific support arrangements. Please complete the Study Plan/Schedule of Assessment form (Appendix 1) with the student as soon as you become aware of the pregnancy and review it at weeks 24 and

36. Support will be available from Student Services and the Wellbeing Team as required. It is also recommended that the school carries out a Health and Safety Assessment (Appendix 2).

10. On return from any period of leave, students should be offered a meeting with their Personal Tutor and in the case of PhD students, their Research Supervisor also, to support their return to study.

For Student Services staff

11. Student services staff will:
 - a. Provide advice and support to academic staff in relation to the operation of this policy.
 - b. Provide advice and support to students in relation to the operation of this policy.
 - c. Provide advice and support to students with psychological or emotional concerns and disabilities, including but not limited to, mental and physical health conditions that may or may not be related to pregnancy or maternity etc.

Children on campus

12. In this document, a child is defined as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people.'
13. We understand that returning to studies after becoming a parent can be challenging and that arranging childcare can be difficult. If you require support in covering the costs of childcare, please see [Financial support for childcare](#).
14. In exceptional circumstances, such as last-minute cancellation of childcare arrangements, the parent might be able to take their child to a single and specific class or activity that does not pose any risk to the child. The parent is responsible for ensuring that the child's behavior does not interrupt the given activity. Please note that children are not permitted in laboratories and in addition, some non-College external buildings, for example the British Medical Association.
15. Children are welcome on campus for short periods of time and for specific activities when a parent's participation isn't required, such as returning a library book.
16. New parents are welcome to breastfeed their babies on campus. The Students' Union is currently working with the different university cafes and to become supporters of the 'Breastfeeding Welcome Here' Scheme.

17. Following the [Working Together to Safeguard Children Act, 2018](#) we all have duty to safeguard children by protecting children from maltreatment, preventing impairment of children's mental and physical health or development, ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care and taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes. If anyone becomes concerned about a child, please contact safeguarding@bbk.ac.uk.

Implementation

18. This is the first version of the Pregnancy and Parental Leave Policy. The policy will be promoted to staff via staff newsletters and email. Students will also be notified in the student newsletter and it will be added to the [student policies](#) area on the website.

Disputes and complaints

19. If a disagreement arises between a student and academic or professional support staff on how this policy should be implemented in respect of their circumstances, or if students are dissatisfied with the College's handling of this policy in respect of their circumstances, students can make a complaint using the [Student Complaints Policy and Procedure](#).

Monitoring and review

20. The implementation of this policy will be reviewed after one year, to ensure its effectiveness: thereafter, the policy will be reviewed on a three-yearly basis.

Related policies: [Safeguarding Policy and Procedure](#)

Policy Review

Created:	May 2023
Latest update:	May 2023
Date of next review:	2026-27 academic year
Owner:	Head of Student Wellbeing Services
SLT owner:	DVC Education and Student Experience
Committee oversight:	Education and Student Experience Committee for Academic Board

Appendix 1 - Student pregnancy and parental leave policy: Study plan/schedule of assessment form

Student details	
Student name	
Student number	
Emergency contact (student to ensure this is consistent with the information on my BBK)	
Name and relationship	
Telephone and email address	
Member of the school conducting this plan	
Name	
Title	
Email address	
Key dates (to be reviewed and added to over the course of pregnancy/maternity)	
What is the student's due date?	
How many weeks pregnant was the student when they notified the University of their pregnancy? (Record the date of receipt of information and method, e.g. email or telephone.)	
Relevant members of the school to be informed	
Personal Tutor- Name (Indicate if they are aware or document that they will be informed as an outcome of this process. They might be the person conducting this meeting.)	
Head of school or nominee – Name (Indicate if they are aware or document that they will be informed as an outcome of this process. They might be the person conducting this meeting.)	
PhD Supervisor- Name (Indicate if they are aware or document that they will be informed as an outcome of this process. They might be the person conducting this meeting.)	

Risk assessment – See Appendix 2	
Has a risk assessment been conducted?	Y/N
Has a risk assessment been arranged? (Please action this as an outcome of the meeting. It can be conducted by either the Personal Tutor, the Head of School [or nominee] or the PhD Supervisor.)	
Pregnancy-related absence (Dates are likely to change, so amend when necessary)	
How much maternity-related absence does the student intend to take?	
When does the student intend to start maternity related absence?	
When does the student intend to return from maternity related absence?	
Will the dates of maternity-related absence affect the student's ability to complete any course module requirements?	
If so, what arrangements can be considered to enable the student to complete the module? i.e. a Break in studies	
What information will the student require during maternity-related absence, to keep up to date on course developments?	
Who will be responsible for providing the information about the course to the student?	
Is the student aware that she needs to contact the University well in advance before the agreed date of return to confirm, where feasible?	

(Indicate a date or week)	
Does the student know who to contact before returning to study? (Name the contact)	
Reasonable adjustments	
Indicate which adjustments are needed, if any and whether they have been put into place. If they haven't, please action it as an outcome of the meeting.	
Any other relevant information	
Plan next to be reviewed on- (As a guidance this document should be completed around the 12 weeks of pregnancy or as soon as the College becomes aware and then reviewed at the 24 and 34 weeks of pregnancy)	
Agreed by staff member	
Name	
Title	
Signature	
Date	
New dates and signatures if amending this form-	
Agreed by student	
Name	
Title	
Signature	
Date	
New dates and signatures if amending this form-	

Agreed by Head of School (or nominee)	
Name	
Title	
Signature	
Date	
New dates and signatures if amending this form-	

Appendix 2 - Student pregnancy: Health and safety assessment

The table below covers most situations that the student might encounter, however no health and safety assessment can be completely exhaustive. It is expected that the pregnant individual will at all times put their and their baby's welfare first. To enable staff to better assist and tailor activities accordingly, there is a requirement for the pregnant individual to keep members of staff aware of any concerns or issues that may arise.

Significant hazards	Examples of when the student might encounter risk	How to lower and manage the risk. Please change as required or document any adjustments agreed	Level of risk (low/med/high) Please change or write N/A
Computers, screens, desk and study environments	Workstation provides adjustment to allow for increase in abdominal size. Advice available on suitable posture to prevent musculoskeletal problems. Ensure long periods of sitting are avoided by engaging in other activity (Risk of DVT).	The pregnant individual to inform member of staff of discomfort or need for change in posture required. Staff to ensure suitable breaks in teaching or activities to allow pregnant individual to change position or alleviate discomfort.	Low
Slips, trips and falls	If individual experiences mobility difficulties in later stages of pregnancy they are to make use of ramps, handrails and lifts accordingly. In later stages of pregnancy, exemption from physically demanding and outdoor activities should be afforded the individual, with alternative study or engagement permitted.	Due to physical and hormonal changes, increased potential risk. Detail of likely terrain and levels of physical exertion (practical/field activity) to be discussed with individual with their current condition being considered.	Low

Lifting and carrying; manual handling	Minimising need for carrying or lifting weights to be a consideration for taught sessions. In later stages of pregnancy, no lifting or carrying is to be expected as part of taught sessions. Staff and students to assist in carrying individual's personal baggage in later stages of pregnancy or as requested by individual.	Pregnant individual to keep staff and informed of any need for assistance. Pregnant individual to ensure does not attempt to be self-reliant past own or advised limitations.	Low
Posture and movement; welfare and fatigue	Ensure adequate toilet facilities provision to prevent infection and kidney disease. Where standing and walking are required for any duration, provide breaks and seating to rest- physical capability is reduced during pregnancy. Activities which require dexterity, agility, coordination, speed, reach and balance- this can increase the risk of accidents.	On trips, regular breaks will have to be scheduled- consider increased pressure and capacity of bladder as pregnancy progresses. Consider provision of a quiet area where the individual may rest, individual to be allowed access to tutorial rooms if available. Workstation adjustments, as appropriate	Low
Lone working	Pregnant women are more likely to need urgent medical attention.	May be necessary to review and revise student access to communications, supervision and emergency procedures.	Med
Stress	Due to physiological, physical and hormonal changes, individual can be more susceptible to stress. Staff are to ensure no undue stress is caused with	Extensions / extenuating circumstances may need to be provided or applied for with a view to attendance and assignments, with the main consideration being to	Low

	regards to study, deadlines or collaborative work.	alleviate stress. Please refer to the Mitigating Circumstances guidance.	
Ionising radiation	Significant exposure can harm the foetus. This could be either through external exposure or by breathing in radioactive contamination.	Studies should be designed to keep the exposure below the limit for pregnant women.	High
Electro magnetic fields/waves	Over-exposure to radio-frequency radiation could cause harm by raising body temperature.	May occur in some Science roles.	Med
Infection / disease (toxoplasmosis, salmonella, E. Coli, etc.)	Student must observe good hygiene practices and be encouraged to regularly and thoroughly wash their hands with soap and water especially before eating or drinking. Personal Protective Equipment (gloves, face mask, lab coat) must be worn as required to reduce the risk of contamination.	Although the College doesn't have courses that interact with animals, the pregnant student should seek expert advice if they interact with domestic or wild animals.	
Biological agent hazard group 2, 3, 4	Many agents within the three risk groups can affect the unborn child if the mother is infected during pregnancy, e.g. hepatitis B, HIV, herpes, TB, Syphilis, Chlamydia, cytomegal, cytomegalovirus, chicken pox, typhoid.	Control measures must be considered (especially in Science or Health courses).	Med

Substances labelled R40,R45, R46, R47; mercury and mercury derivatives	These substances may cause risk to health to you and/or the unborn or breastfed child, depending on how they are used. When undertaking laboratory work or using dark rooms, harmful chemicals must not be handled. Pharmaceuticals such as cytotoxic drugs must be avoided.	Protection will be given against exposure to lead and asbestos.	Med
Chemical agents dangerous / absorbed through the skin (such as pesticides) or breathed	Risk will depend on the way in which the substance is being used, as well as its hazardous properties. Absorption through the skin can result from localised contamination – e.g. splashes on the skin or clothing, or in certain cases from exposure to high atmospheric concentrations of vapour. Air born agents such as carbon monoxide, dry cleaning agents and gluteraldehyde and anaesthetic gases.	Avoid using areas on campus where chemicals may be used by Facilities Management Service	Med
Lead and lead derivatives	The nervous system of young children is particularly sensitive to the toxic effects of lead and you should avoid this kind of exposure. Lead may affect students who work with paints and glazes (e.g. in art courses) as well as with chemicals.	Although it is rare at the College, students working with art materials may be of particular risk and local advice should be sought.	Med

Temperature / Humidity	Staff to ensure temperature and humidity to be suitably controlled where possible. Staff to advise on suitable clothing / equipment if working outside. Breastfeeding can be impaired by heat dehydration.	In outdoor environments staff to monitor conditions and amend activity if required. Ensure drinking water is available or carried.	Low
Travel	For long journeys, schedule regular breaks (see welfare and fatigue). When advised by a doctor, individual may be excused from wearing a seat belt in a vehicle.	Individual should not sit in front of vehicle if not wearing a seat belt. Exemption from wearing a seat belt should be proven by signed doctor's letter.	Med
Any other relevant information			
Student's details			
Student name			
Student number			
Email address			
Date			
Signature			
Member of the school conducting this assessment			
Name			
Title			
Email address			
Date			
Signature			