

# Student Pregnancy and Parental Leave Policy

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Birkbeck, University of London values the diversity of its student community and is committed to providing an inclusive, supportive environment, in which all students, regardless of background, can achieve their full potential. At Birkbeck we aim to create a welcoming and inclusive environment where all students and their families are welcomed.
- 1.2. The University 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.
- 1.3. 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 women outside the workplace. In doing so, the Act specifically mentions the HE sector.
- 1.4. 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'](#).
- 1.5. Birkbeck is committed to ensuring that all students and applicants are treated fairly. It is also the commitment of the university to ensure the health and safety of its students and members of staff and particularly of any minors.

## 2. Guidance

- 2.1. 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.

### 2.1.1. Contacting the School, Faculty

You have the right to inform the College whenever you feel comfortable to do so, however we recommend that you contact 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.

### 2.1.2. 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 maternity 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 they will complete with you the **Study Plan/Schedule of Assessment form – Appendix 1** of this document.

### 2.1.3. 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 allowed to attend university 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**.

### 2.1.4. 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](#).

## 2.2. Still births and miscarriages

2.2.1. In the event of a student having a miscarriage, a still birth or neonatal death they are encouraged to contact the [Counselling Service](#) for support during that difficult time.

2.2.2. 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.

## 2.3. New parents through adoption or other

2.3.1. Students who are due to become new parents through adoption or other, should inform 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**.

## 2.4. For the Personal Tutor and Head of School

### 2.4.1. 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 on the 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 Wellbeing Team as required.

It is also recommended that the school carries out a **Health and Safety Assessment (appendix 2)**.

### 2.4.2. 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.

## 2.5. For Student Services staff

Student services staff will:

- 2.5.1. Provide advice and support to academic staff in relation the operation of this policy.
- 2.5.2. Provide advice and support to students in relation to the operation of this policy.
- 2.5.3. 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, maternity etc.

## **2.6. Children on campus**

- 2.6.1. In this document, a child is defined as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people.'
- 2.6.2. We understand that returning to studies after becoming a parent can be challenging and that arranging childcare can be difficult. If you require support covering the costs of childcare please see [Financial support for childcare](#).
- 2.6.3. 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 behaviour does not interrupt the given activity [Please note that children are not permitted in laboratories and in addition some non-Birkbeck external buildings, for example the British Medical Association].
- 2.6.4. Children are welcome on campus for short periods of time and for specific activities when parent's participation isn't required such like returning a book in the library.
- 2.6.5. New parents are welcome to breastfeed their babies on campus. The Student Union is currently working with the different university cafes and to become supporters of the 'Breastfeeding Welcome Here' Scheme.
- 2.6.6. 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](mailto:safeguarding@bbk.ac.uk).

## **3. Implementation**

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

## **4. Disputes and complaints**

- 4.1. 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 students are dissatisfied with the University's handling of this policy in respect of their circumstances, students can make a complaint using the [Student Complaints Policy and procedure](#).

## **5. Monitoring and review**

- 5.1. The implementation of the policy will be reviewed after one year to ensure its effectiveness. Thereafter, the policy will be reviewed on a three-yearly basis.

## **6. Related policies**

### 6.1. [Safeguarding Policy and Procedures](#)

## Appendix 1 - Student pregnancy and maternity policy: Study plan/schedule of assessment form

<b>Student's details</b>	
<b>Student name</b>	
<b>Student number</b>	
<b>Emergency contact</b> (student to ensure this is consistent with the information on my BBK)	
<b>Name and relationship</b>	
<b>Telephone and email address</b>	
<b>Member of the school conducting this plan</b>	
<b>Name</b>	
<b>Title</b>	
<b>Email address</b>	
<b>Key dates</b> (to be reviewed and added to over the course of pregnancy and maternity)	
<b>What is the student's due date?</b>	
<b>How many weeks pregnant was the student when they notified the University of their pregnancy?</b> (record the date of receipt of information and method, e.g. email or telephone.)	
<b>Inform relevant members of the school</b>	
<b>Personal Tutor (add name)</b>	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.
<b>Head of school or nominee(add name)</b>	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.
<b>PhD Supervisor (add name)</b>	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.
<b>Risk assessment – See appendix 2</b>	
<b>Has a risk assessment be conducted</b>	<b>Y/N</b>
<b>Has a risk assessment been arranged</b>	Please action this as an outcome of the meeting. It can be conducted but either the Personal Tutor, the Head of School (or nominee) or the PhD Supervisor.
<b>Pregnancy-related absence</b> (Dates are due to change so do amend when necessary)	
<b>How much maternity-related absence does the student intend to take?</b>	
<b>When does the student intend to start maternity related absence?</b>	
<b>When does the student intend to return from maternity related absence?</b>	
<b>Will the dates of maternity-related absence affect the student's ability to complete any course module requirements?</b>	
<b>If so, what arrangements can be considered to enable the student to complete the module? i.e a Break in</b>	

<b>Studies</b>	
<b>What information will the student require during maternity-related absence to keep up to date on course developments?</b>	
<b>Who will be responsible for providing the information about the course to the student?</b>	
<b>Is the student aware that she needs to contact the University well in advance before the agreed date of return to confirm, where feasible?</b>	Indicate a date or week
<b>Does the student know who to contact before returning to study?</b>	Name the contact
<b>Reasonable adjustments</b>	
<b>Indicate which adjustments are needed if any and whether they have been put in place. If they haven't please action it as an outcome of the meeting.</b>	
<b>Any other relevant information</b>	
<b>Plan next to be reviewed on</b>	As a guidance this document should be completed around the <b>12 weeks</b> of pregnancy or as soon as the university becomes aware and then reviewed at the <b>24 and 34 weeks</b> of pregnancy
<b>Agreed by staff member</b>	
<b>Name</b>	
<b>Title</b>	
<b>Signature</b>	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>New dates and signatures if amending this form</b>	
<b>Agreed by student</b>	
<b>Name</b>	
<b>Title</b>	
<b>Signature</b>	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>New dates and signatures if amending this form</b>	
<b>Agreed by Head of School (or nominee)</b>	
<b>Name</b>	
<b>Title</b>	
<b>Signature</b>	
<b>Date</b>	

<p><b>New dates and signatures if amending this form</b></p>	
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## 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 her and the 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 experience 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 of 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 individuals 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 accident	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	Med



		communications, supervision and emergency procedures.	
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 regards study, deadlines or collaborative work	Extensions / extenuating circumstances may need to be provided or applied for with a view to attendance and assignments, with the main consideration being to alleviate stress. Please refer to the <a href="#">Mitigating Circumstances Guidance</a>	Low
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 her 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 BBK 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 agent such as carbon monoxide, dry cleaning agents and gluteraldehyde and	Avoid using areas on campus where chemicals may be used by Facilities Management Service	Med

	<b>anaesthetic gases</b>		
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 BBK.  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 available or carried	Low
Travel	For long journeys schedule regular breaks (see welfare and fatigue) When advised by a doctor individual may be excused 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 doctors letter	Med

<b>Any other relevant information</b>

<b>Student's details</b>	
<b>Student name</b>	
<b>Student number</b>	
<b>Email address</b>	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>Signature</b>	

<b>Member of the school conducting this assessment</b>
<b>Name</b>
<b>Title</b>
<b>Email address</b>
<b>Date</b>
<b>Signature</b>

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Title</b>	
<b>Email address</b>	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>Signature</b>	