

BSU Policy and Procedure for student pregnancy, maternity and new parents

[Content warning: Reference to pregnancy, miscarriage and ill-health]



BATH SPA
UNIVERSITY

1. Purpose

Bath Spa University is committed to supporting students, whatever their circumstances. This policy and procedure sets out the University's arrangements and support available to students if they are pregnant (including the requirements if they need time away from their studies due to antenatal care appointments), or are undergoing fertility treatment, adoption or surrogacy. It also outlines the support available for students who are new parents, including maternity, adoption, paternity, and/or secondary carer or partner arrangements.

The policy provides a brief overview of the relevant legislation and sets out the guiding principles which staff and students must adhere to. More detailed guidance is within the procedure section of this document.

This policy and procedure is written to align with the 'Student pregnancy and maternity: implications for higher education institutions' guidelines published in 2010 by the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), available through [AdvanceHE](#).

The Equality Act 2010 strengthened the legal protection that students are entitled to during pregnancy and maternity, with both being protected characteristics, and discrimination on these grounds being prohibited. As such, the principles set out in this policy must be adhered to by staff responding to students who are pregnant or parents of very young children.

2. Scope and definitions

This policy and procedure applies to all Bath Spa University registered students who become pregnant during their studies; students who have given birth within the previous 26 weeks; students whose partner becomes pregnant; students undertaking fertility treatment (including surrogacy); and students becoming a parent through adoption of a child. Educational Partners will follow the same principles outlined in this policy and are responsible for ensuring appropriate arrangements are in place.

For the purposes of this policy and procedure the following definitions are used:

- Parent: person(s) who will share the main responsibility for the child.
- Partner: the parent's spouse, civil partner or someone living with them in an enduring family relationship, but not their sibling, child, parent, grandparent, grandchild, aunt, uncle, niece or nephew.

3. Policy

Bath Spa University believes that becoming pregnant, adopting a child, becoming a parent or taking a period of maternity, adoption or parental leave should not prevent a student from successfully completing their studies at the University. However, it is important to acknowledge that pregnancy or the

period after giving birth or adopting a child may result in health or other issues affecting a student's studies or progress. The support available to pregnant students and students who are new parents aims to mitigate this as much as possible.

The University is committed to providing support and flexibility to students who become pregnant, adopt a child or become a parent. The level of flexibility that can be offered may vary according to different programmes, level and mode of study, and whether there are any statutory or professional requirements of a programme of study.

It is expected that all staff will adhere to the following principles and the guidelines and arrangements explained in the procedure.

4. Principles

- **Avoiding less favourable treatment** - staff should make every effort not to treat a student less favourably than other students on the grounds of pregnancy or maternity/paternity or for reasons relating to adoption or fertility treatment.
- **Taking a flexible approach** - the University recognises its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and staff must take a flexible approach to facilitating the continued learning of, and high-quality, safe student experience for students who become pregnant, adopt a child, or become a parent.
- **Demonstrating a non-judgmental and sensitive approach** - when working with students who become pregnant, adopt a child, or become a parent, staff must take an open-minded and non-judgmental approach and treat students with sensitivity and confidentiality. A student's circumstances should only be revealed to staff members who have a valid reason for the knowledge, and only with the prior consent of the student concerned. Once Staff members are aware of the student's circumstances, they should be mindful of the possible physical and emotional issues which students who are either pregnant or become new parents may be experiencing, e.g. difficulty engaging with teaching and learning fully.
- **Enabling informed choices** - staff roles in these circumstances is to provide advice to the student, and to consider, in consultation with the student and other relevant parties, the level of flexibility that can be applied to the student's programme or period of study to provide appropriate support. Members of staff must not attempt to direct or unduly influence the decisions of a student.
- **Providing opportunities for students to engage with and continue with study successfully on their return** - a student may feel out of touch with university life and find it hard to engage in academic thinking after a pregnancy/ maternity/parental leave break. A student may also feel isolated due to former peers continuing and completing their studies within different time scales. Providing opportunities for contact during Maternity/Parental

Leave, and access to the library to keep up to date with academic thinking in their field, can help a student to mentally prepare for, and to return to, academic life after Maternity/Parental Leave.

- **Health and safety** – pregnancy should not be equated with poor health. However, there are health and safety considerations that arise during pregnancy and breastfeeding, and the risks to which students could be exposed must be assessed.

5. Procedure

5.1 Notification of pregnancy

- Students are not legally obliged to inform the University if they are pregnant or become pregnant during their studies. However, students are strongly encouraged to make the University aware of a pregnancy at the earliest opportunity, as this will help the University to start implementing appropriate supportive measures and arrangements. Students on programmes of study that include potential high-risk activities, such as working with chemicals or heavy machinery, are particularly encouraged to disclose their pregnancy as soon as possible.
- Pregnant students are advised to speak with their Academic Advisor, Student Wellbeing Services or Student Academic and Registry Services as soon as possible. The member of staff should seek the student's permission to share the information with other relevant members of staff on a strictly need-to-know basis. Not all students will want or be able to continue with their pregnancy. As such, information about a student's pregnancy should be treated sensitively and should usually only be passed on with the student's consent.
- When appropriate, the student should be made aware of additional options for advice and support, within and external to the University. For example, the student's doctor, Student Wellbeing Services, Students' Union Advice Service. Assumptions should not be made about whether the student intends to proceed with their pregnancy on the basis of their age, disability, gender identity, race, religion or belief, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, or stage of study.

5.2 Student pregnancy and maternity support plan

The 'Student pregnancy and maternity support form' provides a template to inform discussion between a student and member of University staff (e.g. Academic Advisor, Module Leader or Student Wellbeing Services Advisor). This plan is designed to help the student and the University consider and discuss any additional support or reasonable adjustments needed to support continuing study during pregnancy or adoption process and beyond, and to provide a consistent approach across the University.

These may include:

- Assessment adjustments, extenuating circumstances claims, extensions or study break.
- Informing other staff or students.
- Adjustments to attendance, including placements.
- Flexibility for antenatal or adoption appointments.
- Period of absence, if required.
- Funding, accommodation or visa advice.
- Health and safety assessment.
- Return to study arrangements.

The lead staff member should meet regularly with the student to review the support plan and adjustments and make any required changes to arrangements. Every student and their experience is individual and the diverse nature of University courses means that the arrangements which can and should be made for a student in these circumstances will vary. The Health and Safety risk assessment will need updating at key points, including because of changes to health during pregnancy, before returning to study and after the student has returned.

5.3 Maternity related absence and parental leave

If altering the study conditions is not reasonably possible, or would not avoid identified risks, or the student requests to, the student may request a study break. All maternity and parental leave requests will be managed in accordance with the University's Study Break Policy, [Study Break Policy](#).

5.4 Health and safety risk assessments

Once a student discloses they are pregnant the University is legally obliged to undertake a risk assessment. The staff member carrying out the risk assessment is responsible for ensuring that appropriate staff are consulted, the student receives a copy, and for sharing the risk assessment to relevant University staff on a strictly 'need to know basis'. Completed risk assessment forms containing personal information are handled confidentially in accordance with the requirements of the University's Data Protection Policy.

BSU new and expectant mothers risk assessment template.

5.5 Health and safety considerations

- If a student is pregnant or has given birth within the previous twelve months, or is breastfeeding, they can face specific risks to their health and that of their unborn child or baby. For most new, expectant or breastfeeding

mothers and parents, normal health and safety measures are adequate. However, when participating in a University activity, the level of risk they are exposed to will depend on:

- The requirements and nature of the event or activity
- Their individual circumstances, as there are physiological and psychological changes during pregnancy that may make them more vulnerable.
- Some of the more common hazards might be:
 - Lifting, handling, carrying heavy loads
 - Posture, travelling, mental and physical fatigue
 - Workstations, working at height, or working alone
 - Standing or sitting for long periods of time
 - Exposure to biological agents, harmful or high-risk substances, or radioactive material
 - Exposure to shocks, vibrations, excessive noise, or extreme heat.
- In particular:
 - The highest risk of damage to an unborn baby is during the first 13 weeks of pregnancy
 - When breastfeeding, there is a risk of passing certain chemicals or biological agents to the baby via breastmilk, and this can be harmful to the baby.
- It is important that students share with the University any advice they have received from a doctor, midwife or other healthcare professional (for example pregnancy-related medical conditions such as high blood pressure, a history of miscarriages) that could affect the risk assessment. Further information on health and safety considerations regarding new and expectant mothers/parents can also be found at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/mothers/>.

5.6 Students on professional programmes

Programmes which are subject to professional/statutory body accreditation or requirements have to meet specific requirements in order to enable students to demonstrate particular areas of knowledge, skills and competencies. These requirements should be considered when planning for any relevant adjustments which may need to be put into place to support a pregnant student, including arrangements during their studies on campus, as well as their maternity/paternity-related absence period and their subsequent return to studies.

5.7 Student route visa holders

Student route visa holders are subject to different requirements than students who do not require a student visa to study in the UK. If a student is a Student route visa holder and they are pregnant, it is very important that they contact

the University's Immigration Compliance Team as soon as possible (immigrationcompliance@bathspa.ac.uk). If the student needs to interrupt their studies due to pregnancy, they and any dependents will normally need to leave the UK, then apply for new entry clearance to return to the UK and resume their studies.

5.8 Trans students and pregnancy

A pregnancy may cause distress for trans students, as they may find the physiological effects of pregnancy dysphoric to their gender. For example, if a trans man or non-binary person becomes pregnant.

Such dysphoric distress may present mental health risks to students that are encountered among cisgender students. It is important to signpost to mental health services to help affected students navigate this. Useful resources include:

- [Trans and non-binary students – Bath Spa University](#)
- [Pregnancy for trans and non-binary parents | Tommy's](#)
- [Having a baby if you're LGBT+ - NHS](#)
- [Help for mental health problems if you're LGBTQ+ - NHS](#)

5.9 Absences, appointments, antenatal care and pre-adoption appointments

- If a student or their partner is pregnant or if they need to attend pre-adoption or surrogacy related appointments, they are entitled to reasonable time off to attend appointments and University staff will aim to do as much as they can to accommodate such requests.
- Students who are due to or have already become a parent will be entitled to request time out of study. This is likely to include time off for medical/pre-adoption appointments, as well as a period of parental leave. The student should give an indication of expected length of time away from study. Flexibility regarding parental leave will be given where possible, although this may be limited for those programmes accredited by professional or statutory bodies.
- There may be occasions where a student's health is adversely affected by pregnancy, or postnatally, and they may need time away from studies, extensions to deadlines, alternative assessments. In such cases, students are advised to speak with their academic team and/or Student Wellbeing Services as soon as possible to discuss the best way of managing this.
- If a student holds parental responsibility or is a legal guardian there may be times when they need to take time out to care for an ill child, breast feed, or take parental leave due to settling a child into the home after adoption etc. Such circumstances should be discussed with the student's academic team or Student Wellbeing Services to agree the best way forward and reduce any negative impact on the student's studies.

- Flexibility will be given where possible, however there may be limitations where a programme is professionally accredited, or the student is on a placement.

5.10 Unplanned and unexpected events

Unexpected complications and situations, for example, miscarriages, still birth, neo natal death, significant pregnancy-related illness, birth trauma, terminations, and post-partum complications, will usually be dealt with under the University's Extenuating Circumstances Policy ([Exceptional circumstances – Bath Spa University](#)). In such cases, the student is likely to need additional support, and the University will sensitively consider the impact on the student's ability to undertake their studies.

5.11 Resuming studies

- Students are not permitted to return to study during the first two weeks from the date of child birth.
- In cases where the University is concerned about a student's physical or mental health in relation to their proposed return to study date, this will be reviewed under the University's Fitness to Study Procedure, [Fitness to Study Procedure](#).
- A student who has been studying full time but who indicates they wish to return to study on a part time basis following maternity or parental leave, and have no visa restrictions, will have their request considered. However, such requests may not always be possible, as they are dependant on the specific programme of study.
- Prior to a student's return, consideration should be given to their requirements, for example any health and safety issues which need to be considered, or the need for the student to take breaks to express milk.

Document Details

Responsible Office: Student Wellbeing Services

Responsible Officer: Director of Student Wellbeing Services

Approving Authority: Academic Board

Date of latest approval: January 2026

Effective Date: January 2026

Related Policies and Procedures: Fitness to Study

Safeguarding

Exceptional Circumstances

Study Break

Supersedes: N/A

Next review due: January 2027