



# **Our approach to supporting students and their partners, and students who become a parent while studying**

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# Introduction

This document sets out the University's approach to supporting current and prospective students who are pregnant or have young children, students whose partner becomes pregnant and students who adopt or have a baby through a surrogacy agreement. It is a resource for current and prospective students and for staff supporting these students and is primarily focused on study-related matters. Further information, advice and guidance on topics such as where to purchase a pregnancy test on campus and financial options to support you once you know you are pregnant, are contained within the [Medical support and Healthcare webpages](#).

We are an inclusive community and this guidance applies to everyone including lesbian, gay, bi and trans students and same-sex couples as well as heterosexual individuals and couples.

Our 'Approach to supporting pregnant students and their partners, and students who become a parent while studying' is one of a suite of documents that sets out how we aim to create an inclusive environment in which all students feel safe and supported. Other related documents include our [Athena SWAN Bronze Institution Action Plan](#), which focuses on our commitment to gender equality more broadly, [our Zero Tolerance Approach to Harassment and Bullying](#), our [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#) and our [Code of Student Conduct](#).

People and Culture and the Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity Service developed this document in collaboration with the Students' Union, incorporating feedback from students.

# Policy Statement on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The University of Essex fosters good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not, celebrates diversity, challenges inequality and is committed to nurturing an inclusive and diverse community that is open to all who have the potential to benefit from membership of it, and which ensures equality of opportunity for all its members. We expect all our campus communities, employees, workers, contractors, students, invitees and visitors to be treated, and to treat others, with dignity and respect. We have a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination, harassment and bullying. Zero tolerance means that (i) we will take action and (ii) the action will be proportionate to the circumstances of the case.

We are committed to meeting our obligations under the Equality Act 2010, which requires the University show no discrimination as required by law on account of age, disability, gender reassignment\*, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. The University will always act lawfully and this may include taking action to support people with particular protected characteristics, including disability and sex. In addition to its obligations under the EA, the University shall adopt policies, practices, and procedures that define expected standards of behaviour and specify any additional characteristics, beyond those required by law, to which protection is provided, for example, in relation to political belief, social background and refugee status.

\*The University's policies, practices and procedures specifically extend to all gender identities including trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming people.

# Principles

The way in which the University supports students who are pregnant or have young children, students whose partner becomes pregnant and students who foster/adopt or have a baby through a surrogacy agreement is based on five key principles:

1. **Taking an individualised approach:** Support will be tailored to each student's needs and circumstances
2. **Ensuring maximum flexibility:** Staff will be as flexible as possible in facilitating continued learning whilst maintaining a high-quality and safe environment for all students
3. **Being sensitive and proactive:** Support will be non-judgemental and offered regularly
4. **Prioritising health and wellbeing:** The mental and physical health of pregnant students and their unborn child will be prioritised at all times
5. **Respecting confidentiality:** Information shared with a member of staff by a student will be shared on a need-to-know basis and in line with the student's wishes

# Section 1: Guidance for students

We want all pregnant students, and those who become a parent while studying, to feel welcome and confident that the University understands what it means to be pregnant whilst studying or being a student with young children and that our people and processes recognise that every journey into parenthood is unique.

## **Notifying the University that you are pregnant, fostering/adopting or having a baby through a surrogacy agreement**

You are encouraged to let a member of University staff know that you are pregnant, have been matched for adoption or having a baby through a surrogacy agreement as soon as possible. We have a specific duty of care for pregnant students but we can only provide you with the relevant information if you have told us about it. In order for us to support you as an individual, we encourage you to have that two-way conversation with us.

This is particularly important if you are taking a course, or embarking on a placement or fieldwork, that has the potential to expose you and/or your unborn baby to significant risk. Potential risks include being exposed to chemicals or being required to undertake strenuous activity.

You can talk to a member of staff in your department or you can contact the Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity Service (SWIS). You should go to whoever you feel most comfortable talking to and can expect them to be sensitive to your needs.

## **Named departmental contact or Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity Service (SWIS) caseworker**

You can request a member of staff in your department or a member of SWIS to become your 'first point of contact'. You should go to whoever you feel most comfortable talking to and can expect them to be sensitive to your needs. Their role is to advise on the support, facilities and services available to you at the University. They will be both responsive to your needs and proactive in checking in with you throughout your pregnancy. They can inform relevant members of staff on your behalf and make sure that you have a risk assessment.

## Confidentiality

Whoever you speak to will treat the information you give them as confidential. This means that the information you have shared will not be shared with anyone else without your consent. The only exception to this is if a member of staff has concerns about your health and wellbeing. If a member of staff breaches confidentiality on this basis, you will be informed.

## Looking after your health and wellbeing

You have a right to study in an environment that is safe for you and your baby and your mental and physical health whilst you are pregnant, within 6 months of giving birth (known as 'maternity') and whilst you are breastfeeding is therefore of paramount importance. To help the University assess possible hazards or risks to your health and wellbeing and that of your baby, you will need to complete a [risk assessment form](#), together with a member of staff in your department. This will be done within two weeks of you informing a member a staff you are pregnant or of returning to study after having a baby in the last 6 months. If any risks are identified, we will put in place measures to manage those risks.

You will also need to complete a [pregnancy and maternity support plan](#) with your first point of contact. This plan helps guide discussions with you during your pregnancy and maternity period and will be reviewed regularly to ensure that any measures put in place to mitigate risk are working effectively and to make adjustments as necessary.

Measures may include an informal flexible study arrangement, for example, permitting a lower level of attendance at lectures/classes/seminars. We will be as flexible as possible and will prioritise your individual circumstances, but the level of flexibility may be restricted by, for example, the structure and content of your course or the requirements of professional bodies.

If you wish to speak to an adviser about your emotional wellbeing whilst pregnant you can contact [SWIS](#) via the Student Services Hub.

## **Attending antenatal, pre-adoption/fostering or fertility treatment appointments**

You will have a number of medical appointments during your pregnancy or fertility treatment and it is important that you attend these. Wherever possible, you should try to schedule appointments outside of scheduled teaching or at the start or end of the placement working day.

If you choose to enrol in antenatal classes to help you prepare for your baby's birth you can take reasonable time off to attend. Once you know when the classes will be, you should inform your tutors if you foresee a clash with teaching events.

If you are adopting/fostering a child you can take reasonable time off to attend pre-adoption/fostering appointments or antenatal appointments.

If attending antenatal, fertility or pre-adoption appointments affects your study in any way, you should discuss with your first point of contact how we might facilitate you to catch up.

If your partner is pregnant or undergoing fertility treatment or you are having a baby through a surrogacy agreement you may wish to attend antenatal/medical appointments with your partner/the baby's other parent. If this means you will miss time in a lecture, class, seminar or placement you should discuss the implications of this with a member of staff in your department as soon as possible. We will make every effort to be as flexible as possible to allow you to attend these appointments.

## **Other pregnancy-related absence**

You may need to take time off your study for reasons related to being pregnant. If this is the case, you should be aware of the options and their implications for you.

For any absences from teaching events you should follow the usual absence procedures by completing the [online form](#)

The [Periods of Extended Absence page](#) has details about what you need to do if you are absent from teaching for more than ten days and what to consider if you are thinking about taking a break from your studies (intermitting). Before deciding if an intermission is the best course of action for you, please discuss this with your first point of contact.

You should be aware that if you are unable to meet the normal requirements of your programme of study for more than six consecutive weeks it may be necessary for you to consider intermission, unless you obtain permission to do so.

It is particularly important that you seek advice if you are a research student or an international student as intermitting may affect things such as the terms and conditions of your funding arrangements or your immigration status.



# Assessments and examinations

You are encouraged to complete your assessed work and sit your examinations whilst you are pregnant or in your maternity period. The SWIS may be able to put adjustments in place for exams and you are encouraged to contact them as soon as possible to discuss the options.

If you are concerned about sitting your exams or meeting assessed coursework deadlines, you should discuss this with your first point of contact in order to explore your options.

During your pregnancy or in your maternity period the [late submission procedure](#) is still available to you and if you feel that your performance in any form of assessment has been impacted detrimentally you can submit an application for [extenuating circumstances](#).

## Maternity leave

Your pregnancy and maternity support plan includes information about how much time you intend taking off your study following the birth of your baby. You can start your maternity leave at any point during your pregnancy but as a minimum, you must take two weeks leave immediately after the birth of your child.

Whilst you may not have decided the timing and duration of your maternity leave when you complete your plan, you are encouraged to consider this at an early stage and, if possible, let your first point of contact know at least 15 weeks before your due date in order for any necessary arrangements to be put in place. If your intended return to study date changes whilst you are on leave, you should also notify your first point of contact.

If you wish to take longer than 6 weeks of maternity leave during teaching time, you should discuss your options with your first point of contact.

When considering the timing and duration of your maternity leave, it is important to take into account the terms and conditions within any bursary or funding arrangements you may have.

# **Paternity leave/maternity support leave/adoption/foster or surrogacy leave**

If your partner is due to give birth whilst you are a student, you adopt or foster a child or have a baby through a surrogacy agreement you may wish to take time off your study. You are encouraged to discuss your options with your first point of contact as soon as possible, at least 15 weeks before the baby is due, if possible.

If you are jointly adopting or fostering a child, or having a baby through a surrogacy agreement with your partner, only one of you can take adoption/foster/surrogacy leave. This applies whether one or both of you are students. The other partner may be entitled to take just statutory paternity leave.

If you are planning to take family leave as described above you should always discuss this and your options with a member of your department.

## **Planning for return to study**

We want to ensure that when you return from a period of family leave you have everything in place to enable you to re-engage effectively in your studies.

Before going on leave, you should discuss your return to study options with your department. In addition to your personal circumstances, factors to consider include the structure and content of your course and, if appropriate, the requirements of your visa. For example, you may wish to request to change your mode of study from full-time to part-time. We will make every effort to accommodate your request to change your mode of study.

Whilst on leave you are encouraged to maintain occasional contact with your department e.g. your first point of contact or your personal tutor, so that you remain connected with the University. You will retain your student card and access to your University email account, the University's electronic resources and the Library.

If you return to study within six months of giving birth, you will continue to be entitled to support from your first point of contact. Your department may also wish to review your risk assessment.

If you return to study after your baby is six months old, you will also be offered ongoing support from your first point of contact but it will not be necessary to review your risk assessment.

Additional information for students can be found in Sections 3 and 4 and the appendix of this document.

# Section 2: Guidance for departmental staff

## Supporting students

### Your responsibilities

Departmental staff supporting students who are pregnant, undergoing fertility treatment, adopting/fostering or having a baby through a surrogacy agreement have a vital role to play in ensuring the student receives appropriate support and guidance before, during and after becoming a parent.

In supporting your student, you must follow the principles set out at the start of this document. This means that you must:

1. Take an individualised approach
2. Ensure maximum flexibility
3. Be sensitive and proactive
4. Prioritise health and wellbeing
5. Respect confidentiality

### Initial disclosure

When a student discloses to you that they are pregnant, undergoing fertility treatment, adopting/fostering or having a baby through a surrogacy agreement, you should ensure that they are aware that they can request a named departmental contact or a member of SWIS to support them. This person will become their 'first point of contact'.

## First point of contact

If you are the first point of contact in the department for a student who is pregnant, undergoing fertility treatment, adopting/fostering or having a baby through a surrogacy agreement your role is to contribute to ensuring the study environment is conducive to their continued learning. You should ensure that:

- You familiarise yourself with the contents of this guidance and seek support or information from SWIS as required
- You arrange for a [pregnancy risk assessment](#) (if appropriate) at the earliest possible opportunity. This may be carried out by yourself or another appropriate person within your department.
- You complete (if appropriate), together with the student the [pregnancy and maternity support plan](#)
- You commit to contacting the student regularly throughout their pregnancy/before they take a period of family leave. Regularity of contact can be agreed between you and the student in the pregnancy and maternity support plan.
- You respect confidentiality and understand the circumstances under which this may need to be breached

Appendix A of this document contains a checklist for 'first point of contact' staff.

## Conducting a pregnancy risk assessment

Before completing the risk assessment form with the student, you should familiarise yourself with the [guidance](#) in order to be prepared for the discussion.

Your primary concern must be the health and wellbeing of the student and facilitating their ongoing engagement with their studies as far as possible. The risk assessment should be monitored regularly to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

## Formulating a plan

The purpose of completing a pregnancy and maternity support plan with the student is to ensure that their needs are met during pregnancy, following birth and when they return to their studies.

The plan sets out the shared understanding of the support that has been discussed and agreed between the department/University and the student. In order to ensure that the plan remains fit for purpose you should specifically ask the student about it as part of your regular contact. You should also remind the student to let you know if anything changes with regard to the plan e.g. a change to their expected date of return to study.

## **Students studying abroad**

If a student is studying abroad during their pregnancy or maternity period, you should liaise with their host institution to ensure their needs are met and to ensure their academic progress is properly managed.

## **Return to study**

Some students may feel isolated or distant from their study whilst they are on a period of family leave. They may also feel anxious about their return. In order to support the student in planning their return, you should encourage them to arrange meetings with key staff in addition to yourself, for example their personal tutor, Head of Department or a member of SWIS.

If the student is returning to study before their baby is six months old, they are entitled to continue to receive support and you will need to make sure that the departmental risk assessment is updated.

Students returning to study after their baby is six months old should also be offered ongoing support but there is no requirement to update the risk assessment.

## **Support from the Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity Service (SWIS)**

Members of SWIS staff can work with you to offer advice about any additional support needs the student may have. They may consider individual exam arrangements if appropriate.

The service can also offer [emotional support](#) to students whilst they are preparing to become a parent. Any finance and immigration queries the student has should be signposted to the [Student Services Hub](#).

# Section 3: General information for students

The topics below are the ones students involved in developing this document thought it was important to include. If you have a question about something not included here, please contact SWIS for advice and guidance.

## **Support if you choose not to continue with a pregnancy**

You are not obliged to let a member of staff know if you decide to terminate a pregnancy but support from SWIS, and external specialist services (listed in Section 4 of this document), is available should you need it.

If you need to be absent from learning events due to having a termination, you should follow the [University's absence procedures](#).

## **Support when things don't go to plan: miscarriage, complications during or after birth, still birth (past the 24th week of pregnancy), neo-natal death**

We want to do what we can to support you if things don't go to plan. In addition to providing emotional support through SWIS we will consider the impact on your ability to meet deadlines and sit exams sympathetically through our extenuating circumstances procedures.

We recognise however that you might not or feel up to completing the necessary forms on your own. If this is the case your first point of contact should be able to assist you.

If you need to be absent from learning events due to having a miscarriage, you should follow the University's absence procedures. Family leave arrangements are not affected if your baby is stillborn or dies shortly after birth.

## Breastfeeding, changing and rest facilities

A parent and baby room 5A.223 is available at Colchester campus where you can feed, change or express in private. You will need to collect a key fob to enter from the information centre. If you require these facilities at the Loughton or Southend campus you should contact the [Student Services Hub](#) in the first instance.

Baby changing facilities are available in a number of locations across all three of our campuses.

## Childcare and funding

You can search for childcare providers across the whole of Essex through Essex County Council's interactive '[find a childcare provider](#)' service. You can find information here about a range of providers including crèches, day nurseries, baby and toddler groups and childminders.

One of the childcare providers is [Wivenhoe Park Day Nursery](#) located on Colchester Campus. Information on childcare provided in the Southend on Sea Borough is provided at [early years education](#).

You may be eligible to apply for a [Childcare Grant](#) to help pay for your childcare costs or a [Parents' Learning Allowance](#) for help with your learning costs.

For more information about childcare visit our '[students with children](#)' webpage.

## Accommodation

If you are living in University or rented accommodation when you become pregnant you should contact [Accommodation Essex](#) or your private landlord. They may assess whether it is still suitable for you. If, for health and safety reasons, Accommodation Essex advise that you should change your accommodation, they will arrange that for you.

If you are likely to have difficulty in evacuating any University building, including your accommodation, in the event of an emergency such as a fire, we will arrange a [PEEP \(Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan\)](#) for you.

Children under the age of 16 are not permitted to live on campus so you will need to make alternative arrangements for after your baby is born. You will be released from your accommodation contract with no penalty. You will need to check the arrangements with any private landlord.

## **Children in the learning environment and on our campuses**

We want to maximise your attendance at learning events and recognise that there may be rare occasions, for example, if you are let down by your childcare provider, when you might want to bring your child into a learning event with you. Whilst teaching staff will make every effort to accommodate this there may be a reason, for example a health and safety consideration, why this is not possible.

If you would like to bring your child into a learning event, you should contact the relevant member of staff as soon as possible to discuss this, and always before the learning event itself.

As a family-friendly University, we also want to support student parents by allowing, wherever possible, you to bring your child on to our campuses in order to access study facilities and social spaces. We will facilitate this wherever possible, however because of the different nature and facilities at each of our campuses, local-level policies apply. If you do bring your child on to campus, you are responsible for ensuring they are not disruptive to others and for their safety.

## **Studying abroad**

If you are studying abroad during your pregnancy or maternity period your first point of contact will liaise with your host institution to ensure that your needs are met.

If you are a UK student studying abroad, you should check the terms and conditions of your visa as you may need to extend your stay or return to the country at a later date.

## **International students**

If you get pregnant whilst studying in the UK you should seek advice from the [Immigration service](#) as soon as possible especially if you require a visa to remain in the UK longer than originally planned.



# Section 4: External support services and additional resources

- **Antenatal results and choices** This charity helps parents through antenatal screening and its consequences.
- **British Pregnancy Advisory Service** This charity advocates and cares for women and couples who decide to end a pregnancy.
- **Adoption UK** This charity is run by and for adopters, providing self-help information, advice, support and training on all aspects of adoption and adoptive parenting.
- **The Miscarriage Association** This charity offers support and information to anyone affected by the loss of a baby in pregnancy.
- **Sands** This still birth and neonatal death charity provides support to anyone affected by the loss of a baby.
- **Working families** This charity provides advice for parents and carers including a guide called: Pregnancy and maternity for students: a guide to finance and benefits.

# Appendix A

## Checklist for 'first point of contact' staff

If you are the first point of contact for a student, using this checklist will help you fulfil your responsibilities and ensure the journey into parenthood is a positive experience for students.

1. Access the '[pregnancy and your studies](#)' pages of the Student Directory to familiarise yourself with the resources and information provided
2. Arrange to meet the student so that you can discuss the support available and complete the Pregnancy and Maternity Support Plan (the Plan).
3. Ask the student whether they have had a pregnancy risk assessment. If they have, ask for a copy. If not arrange for one to be carried out. You can carry out a pregnancy risk assessment yourself or, with the consent of the student, you can ask the person in your department who deals with risk assessments (if you have one).
4. Agree with the student how often they would like to be in contact and set up calendar reminders to check in with them.
5. Consider whether you need to inform any other staff about the pregnancy e.g. your Department Manager, the student's personal tutor, SWIS, placement contacts etc. Before informing anyone else, obtain the consent of your student to do so (a consent form is at the back of the Plan).
6. When checking in with the student review the Plan to make sure it remains fit for purpose. Prompt if you think the risk assessment needs updating.
7. Offer your support as first point of contact until the baby is 6 months old.

## Checklist for students

If you are pregnant or about to become a parent we encourage you to inform the university as soon as possible so that we can put in place the support you need. Using this checklist will help to ensure you are aware of your options and the support available to you.

1. Identify someone to be your 'first point of contact'. This can be a member of staff in your department or a member of the Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity Service (SWIS). You can approach the member of staff directly or via another member of staff.
2. Meet with your first point of contact to discuss support and to complete a Pregnancy and Maternity Support Plan (if appropriate).
3. If you are pregnant, ensure your department carries out a pregnancy risk assessment. Your first point of contact will arrange this.
4. If you are considering intermitting, you will need to consider the impact on the following: continuing with your studies, your University accommodation (if applicable), tuition fees, eligibility for benefits and exemptions. Before deciding to intermit, talk to your first point of contact.
5. If you are a Tier 4 student, you should seek immigration advice from the [International Services Team](#).
6. Attend planned meetings with, and respond to emails from, your first point of contact.
7. If you have any queries, or experience any difficulties, in relation to your pregnancy or accessing your studies, talk to your first point of contact as soon as possible.

# Policy information

**Title:** Our approach to supporting pregnant students and their partners, and students who become a parent while studying.

**Policy Classification:** Guidelines

**Security Classification:** Open

**Security Rationale:**

**Nominated Contact:** Head of Student Wellbeing and Inclusivity

**Responsible UoE Section:** Academic Section

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