



Support for Pregnant Students

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1. Introduction

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy articulates our commitment to embedding equality, diversity and inclusion within our organisational culture for the benefit of staff, students and applicants irrespective of whether or not they share any of the characteristics protected under the Act¹. We therefore strive to look beyond our legal obligations, as set out in the Equality Act 2010, in order to promote and advance equality, diversity and inclusion as we believe this to be ethically right and socially responsible. We are mindful therefore of the need to ensure that our students are not discriminated against on the grounds of pregnancy or maternity at any point within the student journey².

Under the Equality Act 2010, discrimination can occur against a student because of her pregnancy or because she has given birth if:

- the student is treated unfavourably because of her pregnancy.
- within 26 weeks of the day of giving birth the student is treated unfavourably because she has given birth; this also applies in cases of miscarriage, still birth and neonatal death.
- the student is treated unfavourably because she is breastfeeding, and the child is less than 26 weeks old; if the child is more than 26 weeks old, unfavourable treatment because of breastfeeding is likely to constitute sex discrimination.

Although the Equality Act 2010 does not offer any protection to those associated with someone who is pregnant or in a period of maternity, or being perceived to be pregnant or in a period of maternity, if a woman's partner is treated unfavourably because of her pregnancy or because she has given birth, this may constitute sexual discrimination.

2. Our approach

Our [Admissions Policy](#) articulates our commitment to realising the potential of every student (including applicants) to succeed with us here at Bloomsbury Institute irrespective of background or circumstances. We firmly believe that potential should know no barriers and so we do not view pregnancy or maternity as an obstacle to success. Instead, we strive to provide as much flexibility as possible to any student who is pregnant or within 26 weeks of the day of giving birth in accordance with our academic regulations and institutional policies and procedures. Again, this also applies in cases of adoption, miscarriage, surrogacy, still birth and neonatal death.

The support we are able to offer and its timeliness is critically dependent on the stage at which the student confides in us.

3. Notification of pregnancy

Students are under no obligation to disclose that they are pregnant, have decided to terminate a pregnancy or have miscarried. However, we would strongly advise them to do so in order for us to signpost at an early stage sources of support (both internal and external), take into account any absences, and put in place any reasonable support measures. Students are encouraged to discuss their circumstances with our Disability and Wellbeing Advisor who also has the role of Pregnancy and Maternity Advisor³. Students should be assured that any information they supply will be dealt with both sympathetically and confidentially, and in a non-judgemental way. Information will only be shared on a need to know basis and with the prior consent of the student concerned.

¹ The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership and pregnancy and maternity.

² The student journey covers admissions; the provision of education; access to any benefit, facility or service; and disciplinary proceedings.

³ The role of Pregnancy and Maternity Advisor is an exempted role meaning that it is a role that can only be fulfilled by a female member of staff.

Students are advised to contact the Finance Department at an early stage to discuss the financial implications of their personal circumstances and any Support Plan put in place for them. In addition, if a student is in receipt of a bursary or scholarship or other funding to support their studies, they should discuss this with the relevant funding body as it may be that their funding will stop should they decide upon a maternity-related leave of absence.

If an international student becomes pregnant, it is particularly important that they seek early advice from us as there may be serious visa implications for them.

4. Support Plan

In consultation with the student and Registry, the Pregnancy and Maternity Advisor will draw up a Support Plan to ensure that (a) the student is not being disadvantaged, and (b) that academic standards are not compromised. Prior to finalisation, the Plan will be referred to the Academic Registrar to ensure that it is compliant with our academic and regulatory policies. All parties involved will need to sign the Plan, namely the student, the Pregnancy and Maternity Advisor, and the Academic Registrar.

At any stage in the above process, advice can be sought by any parties (including the student) of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC)⁴. EDIC is responsible, *inter alia*, for ensuring the provision of reasonable support mechanisms for staff and students with particular protected characteristics, as defined by the Equality Act 2010, and providing students and staff with an opportunity to discuss any concerns that they might have in relation to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. EDIC can be contacted via edic@bil.ac.uk

Given the emphasis we strive to place on both treating the student fairly and maintaining academic standards, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to accommodate all the requests that a student might make. In the event of the student requesting an adjustment which the Pregnancy and Maternity Advisor does not consider reasonable, the Pregnancy and Maternity Advisor should refer the request to our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee for their advice. The Pregnancy and Maternity Advisor should record in the Support Plan any decision to refuse a particular request.

There may be occasions when the student's repeated absences will have an adverse impact on the studies of others e.g. those the student is working with on a group or pair work basis. In these circumstances, the needs of other students would also need to be considered.

In the case of students who are pregnant and already benefitting from adjustments for reasons other than pregnancy, we will separate out the different issues and clarify with the student what flexibility relates to which reasons. For example, if a pregnant student is already receiving reasonable adjustments relating to disability, we need to consider what flexibility we would permit for a student without a disability who is pregnant and ensure that the same flexibility is afforded to the pregnant student. Were we not to do so, we would be in danger of treating the student with a disability less favourably than a student without a disability.

The Support Plan will summarise any special arrangements required during the pregnancy, the discussions had with the student regarding possible risks and an agreed timescale for her return to study. The arrangements themselves will vary depending on a wide range of factors that will reflect the student's individual circumstances and wishes, the point at which the student is in their studies, the structure and content of the particular course they are taking, any restrictions imposed by professional bodies and any related health and safety matters etc.

It is important to note and explain to the student that should they decide not to take advantage of any adjustment which we have approved, they will not be able to use it in support of any subsequent Mitigating Circumstances claim. See Appendix A.

Support Plans may be relevant in the case of pregnancy, adoption, miscarriage, still birth and neonatal death.

⁴ See Appendix B of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy for contact details.

Outlined below are just some of the measures the student might want to explore with our Pregnancy and Maternity Advisor with a view to incorporating them within an agreed Support Plan.

4.1 Authorised periods of absence

Should the student wish, she can study up to her due date, where practicable. However, she can also choose not to do so as she is entitled to request authorised periods of absence. These would include a break from attending classes at least two weeks after giving birth for health and safety reasons, and also any antenatal care. The student might also ask to take a more lengthy maternity-related absence⁵ by applying for a period of suspension. Information on suspension of studies is outlined in our [Withdrawal Suspension and Deferral Policy](#)

We would normally recommend that a student takes at least 6 months to a year's study break interruption. In this way the student can take a break for one semester or one year in her studies and then resume again. However, if by deferring her studies, it means that she will need to take longer to complete her degree than would normally be permissible in line with either our regulations, those of the University of Northampton or those of any relevant professional body, we will not be able to approve any such request.

We will endeavour to help students who are granted authorised absences or who embark on a period of maternity-related leave to catch-up on any lectures, seminars or workshops missed to ensure that they are not at an academic disadvantage from doing so.

In the case of a prolonged absence, our Pregnancy and Maternity Advisor will contact the student prior to her scheduled return to discuss any concerns the student might have about returning to study. Upon her return, our Pregnancy and Maternity Advisor will ensure that she is fully supported in her re-integration.

Students with a Tier 4 (General) visa are not eligible for a study break and so for any lengthy breaks, they would need to withdraw from the course. We may grant a Tier 4 student permission to miss classes for pregnancy related absences, provided the student is not going to miss 10 consecutive visa contact points (10 timetabled days of classes). The Maternity and Pregnancy Advisor is required to seek advice from Registry on all pregnancy-related requests related to Tier 4 students.

4.2 Assessment and examination

If a student is due to give birth near to or during assessment deadlines or the examination period, and she wishes to complete her assessed work or sit her examinations, she is welcome to do so⁶. However, the student can also ask for reasonable adjustments to be made in order to help her fulfil the requirements of her course. These adjustments might involve the following examples

- Arrangements for the student to sit the examination in a location separate from other students in order to accommodate rest breaks and more frequent toilet breaks than those allowed for students who are not pregnant.
- Arrangements **for** alternative means of assessment for the student (for example, a written assessment instead of a presentation) where necessary.
- Arrangements for the student to retake the examination at the next fixed examination period or agree an extension for resubmitting coursework. Retakes of examinations would be considered as the student's first attempt.
- The application of mitigating circumstances procedures in order to offer adjustments to submission dates for assessed coursework.

⁵ The recommended period of maternity-related absence is 6 months to 1 year.

⁶ In some cases, we may feel it appropriate to ask the student to provide written confirmation from her doctor that she is fit to sit exams.

5. Sharing the Support Plan

With the consent of the student, the Plan will be shared with the student's other tutors to ensure that measures in the Plan are applied consistently. The Pregnancy and Maternity Advisor will meet with the student on a regular basis to monitor and review the Plan so that it continues to provide the support the student needs. In addition, the student is encouraged to maintain a regular dialogue with the Pregnancy and Maternity Advisor and their tutors particularly if they are experiencing any difficulties with their academic work as a result of any flexible arrangements or adjustments agreed.

6. Internship placements

Any student who is pregnant and wishing to take an Internship Placement should seek advice from our Employability Advisor. In addition, the student would be advised to notify her employer of her pregnancy at the earliest opportunity since her employer would need to undertake a risk assessment and take responsibility for any issues relating to the student's pregnancy.

7. Support for partners

Students whose partners (regardless of gender) are pregnant, should notify the Pregnancy and Maternity Advisor as early as possible in order to agree any absences they might need in order to attend antenatal appointments with their partner and/or take some time off around the time of the birth. Any student wishing to take maternity/paternity-related leave would need to notify us in writing at least 15 weeks prior to their partner's due date. If in receipt of any funding, the student would also need to contact their relevant funding body to establish whether there would be any financial implications for them as a result of taking maternity/paternity-related leave of absence.

In addition, if a student's partner develops any complications with her pregnancy, or any maternity-related illness, the student should notify us so that we can help to support them during this period. This early dialogue is vital in case their partner's pregnancy or pregnancy-related health issues are likely to impact significantly on their studies. It may be that the student will be able to apply for mitigating circumstances in the event of the birth or serious pregnancy related illnesses coinciding with examinations and assessment deadlines.

8. Breastfeeding and rest facilities

The Equality Act 2010 affords explicit protection to women who breastfeed in public places and we would not refuse a student access to Bloomsbury Institute premises because they are breastfeeding or have a baby under 26 weeks old with them. Our approach is that provided babies are supervised at all times, any health and safety risks have been addressed, and there is no disruption to other students' learning, babies should be allowed on Bloomsbury Institute premises to deal with administrative issues.

Any students needing to breastfeed their baby whilst on Bloomsbury Institute premises, should seek advice from the Student Hub on a possible private area in which to do this and we will do our best to accommodate such a request whenever possible.

Students with young babies wishing to access the facilities offered by Birkbeck College, would need to refer to Birkbeck's Guidance Notes on [Children, Young Persons and Vulnerable Adults](#) on Birkbeck premises. The latter state that students and visitors can bring their children onto Birkbeck premises only for social purposes such as organised functions or for brief visits that are restricted to low hazard areas. However, the children must remain under the supervision of an adult at all times. It is not possible, therefore, for students to take children into classes with them.

9. Miscarriage, still births and neonatal deaths

We would encourage any student who miscarries to speak to either one of their tutors or our Pregnancy and Maternity Advisor (depending on who they feel most comfortable talking to) to explore avenues of support available to them.

In terms of authorised leave arrangements, we would not make any distinction between live births, still births or the death of a baby shortly after birth.

10. Terminations

Students who decide not to continue with their pregnancy are encouraged to speak in complete confidence with the Pregnancy and Maternity Advisor for support and advice.

11. Support and independent advice

Although students are advised to notify our Pregnancy and Maternity Advisor of their circumstances, they are also welcome to approach a member of the Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Success Team, or the Head of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee for support and advice. Their contact details can be found in Section 13 below.

If a student is unhappy with the support or advice offered, they may wish to raise the matter with either our Student Guild or our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC). Alternatively, students may choose to explore this through our [Student Complaints Policy and Procedures](#).

12. Risk Assessment

The delivery of our courses takes place in Birkbeck premises and we comply with and follow Birkbeck rules and regulations (for more information, please check the webpages below). The nature and delivery of our courses do not pose additional risks to the health and safety of pregnant students beyond those that are covered by our existing compliance.

Birkbeck's Safety Office

<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/so/>

Working Safely at your Computer

<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/so/safety/DSE2>

Working with display screen equipment (DSE)

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg36.pdf>

Pregnancy and baby (NHS)

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/backache-pregnant/>

13. Sources of Support

Internal

- Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion maria.jackson@bil.ac.uk
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee edic@bil.ac.uk
- Learning Enhancement and Employability lee@bil.ac.uk
- Finance Department slcfinance@bil.ac.uk
- Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Success sews@bil.ac.uk
- Pregnancy and Maternity Advisor disability@bil.ac.uk
- Student Guild guildmanager@bil.ac.uk

External

Reproductive Health and Pregnancy advice

- British Pregnancy Advisory Service
www.bpas.org.uk
- NHS Pregnancy Care Planner
www.nhs.uk/Planners/pregnancycareplanner
- NHS Pregnancy
www.nhs.uk/chq/pages/Category.aspx?CategoryID=54
- NHS Travelling in pregnancy
<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/pages/travel-pregnant.aspx>

Advice and support on miscarriages and stillbirths

- www.nhs.uk/conditions/Stillbirth/Pages/Definition.aspx
- www.tommys.org
- www.uk-sands.org
- <https://www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk/>
- <https://www.childbereavementuk.org/>

Advice and support on terminations

- www.mariestopes.org.uk

Childcare providers

- <https://www.gov.uk/find-registered-childminder>

Adoption

- www.adoptionuk.org.uk

Finances

- www.dwp.gov.uk
- www.hmrc.gov.uk/childbenefit/index.htm

14. Related regulations, policies and procedures

Bloomsbury Institute

- Admissions Policy
- Engagement Policy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

- Safeguarding Policy

Appendix A: Pregnancy and Maternity Support Plan

This form aims to guide discussions with students during their pregnancy and maternity and will therefore help shape (and form part of) any Support Plan agreed for the student. The Maternity and Pregnancy Advisor will complete the form with input from the student and relevant Course Leader.

The form should be reviewed at key stages (e.g. 24 weeks and prior to return to study). If the student's circumstances change the plan will be amended.

Contact details		
1	Student's details	
	Name	
	Student number	
2	Reason for support	
	Pregnancy, adoption, miscarriage, still birth, neonatal birth, termination etc (please specify)	
3	Course details	
	Course title	
	Year of Course	
Key dates (to be reviewed and added to over the course of pregnancy and maternity)		
4	What is the student's due date or that of their partner?	
5	When were we notified of the student's due date or that of their partner?	
Informing other staff and students		
6	Who will need to be informed about the student's pregnancy and when would the student like them to be informed? [The student will be required to complete a Consent to Share form.]	
	Name and title	Date
Pregnancy-related absence		
7	Will the dates or times of antenatal appointments affect the student's studies?	
8	Are there any pregnancy-related illnesses that may affect the student's ability to continue with their studies?	

9	If yes to either of the above questions, what arrangements have been made to enable the student to catch up?	
Assessments		
10	Is the student unable to complete any assessments due to her pregnancy or maternity?	
11	If so, provide details:	
12	What alternative arrangements have been made for any outstanding or incomplete assessments? Is the student involved in any group work assessments or projects that may have implications for other students? If "yes", who is the module leader?	
Maternity-related absence (students should provide information in writing at least 15 weeks before their due date)		
13	How much maternity-related absence does the student intend to take?	
14	When does the student intend to start maternity-related absence?	
15	When does the student intend to return from maternity-related absence?	
16	Will the dates of maternity-related absence affect the student's ability to complete any course or module requirements?	
17	If so, what arrangements have been made to enable the student to complete the module?	
18	What information will the student require during maternity-related absence to keep up to date on course developments?	
Finance		
19	Has the student been advised to explore the financial implications of their circumstances for their studies?	
20	Is the (UK) student aware that their mode of study will affect their childcare funding entitlement?	
International Students		
21	If the student has a Tier 4 Visa, has she been advised to clarify with the UKVI any implications for her visa status?	
22	Possible airline restriction?	
Mitigating Circumstances		

23	Has the student been informed about how to apply for extenuating circumstances in the event their pregnancy, maternity or parental responsibilities affect examinations and assessments?	
24	Further Information Any other information or comments. Continue on a separate sheet if necessary	

Final details and signatures	
Plan to be reviewed on	
Approved by Academic Registrar	
Name	
Signature	
Date	
Agreed by Pregnancy and Maternity Advisor	
Name	
Signature	
Date	
Agreed by student	
Name	
Signature	
Date	