

Student maternity and family-related leave (research)

The University is committed to supporting students during life events and believes that becoming a parent should not prevent a student from successfully completing their studies.

This policy covers postgraduate research students¹ who are pregnant, the primary adopter of a child, or whose partner becomes pregnant or is the primary adopter of a child. It outlines the University's approach to students regarding pregnancy, surrogacy, adoption and new-parent related leave. The policy applies to full-time and part-time students.

The policy applies to students who are pregnant and give birth as well as those who will become parents through adoption, surrogacy or their partner's pregnancy. It outlines the support students are entitled to receive from the University and the procedures that they must follow. It also includes guidance on other resources.

Planning to become a parent

A student may become a parent through pregnancy, adoption, surrogacy or a partner's pregnancy. Students expecting to become a parent should inform the collegiate University so that support can be arranged.

Students expecting to become a parent are expected to continue with their studies until around the time of birth or adoption of the child, with some time to prepare for the child's arrival.

Students who are considering having a child during their studies should be aware that it may entail additional costs for accommodation, subsistence and childcare. It is the student's responsibility to meet the costs of any dependents while studying. Limited support is available from the University in the form of childcare bursaries. Additionally, many funders do not provide extra support for dependents. Students are advised to consider the level of financial support that would be available to them from their own resources, their family, their funder or the State (through the welfare system).

¹ Doctoral students (PhD, EdD, MD and BusD), CPGS and MPhil by thesis

Trying to conceive and fertility treatments

Students trying to conceive or undergoing fertility treatments should receive support. Where possible, flexibility should be provided to allow attendance at necessary medical appointments.

Students requiring more than two weeks away from study for a period of treatment or ill-health due to treatment side effects must apply to intermit.

Students may seek support from their College Tutor, College Nurse or via the [University Counselling Service](#).

An external source of advice is [Fertility Network UK](#) which offers some helpful [resources for those wishing to learn more about fertility](#) on their website. They also have a [regional online group](#) that offers peer support for those experiencing fertility issues.

During Pregnancy

Students who become pregnant should inform the collegiate university as early as possible and no later than the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth. This is to ensure that support is put in place.

Students should speak to their Supervisor or College Tutor.

Students should be asked for permission to share this information with other relevant to facilitate support. If the pregnancy is disclosed to the College, this should be shared with an appropriate contact within the student's department(s) and vice versa.

Students must complete a [risk assessment](#) to mitigate potential risks to themselves and their child. This is particularly important for students working with biological agents or certain chemicals. Students who receive any advice from a medical practitioner (e.g. a doctor, nurse or midwife) must share this so that further adjustments can be made if needed. Students can seek support from their Supervisor or Director of Postgraduate Education when completing the risk assessment.

If a risk assessment determines that Occupational Health advice is needed, a referral should be made by the student's Department using the [Management Referral Form](#).

Students are allowed time off to attend antenatal appointments. This applies to students who are pregnant and to partners. Similarly, students are allowed time away from their studies to attend pre-adoption appointments. Funded students are advised to check whether their funder places limits on the number of appointments that they are able to attend.

Students may also need time away from their studies due to pregnancy-related illness. Students who need more than two weeks away from their studies must apply to intermit their studies.

Students on a student visa should contact the International Student Office for advice on the implications to their visa of taking a period of leave during pregnancy.

Miscarriage and Baby Loss

Students who or whose partners experience miscarriage or terminate a pregnancy do not need to disclose this information. Support is available from their College Nurse, College Tutor or the University Counselling Service. Students who need a break from their studies of more than 2 weeks should intermit.

If a student's child is stillborn after 24 weeks of pregnancy or is born alive any point during the pregnancy but does not survive, they are entitled to a period of maternity or paternity/partner leave. Students should be encouraged to take leave but if they choose not to, they should not return to study earlier than two weeks after the birth.

The organisations below are also able to provide support:

The [Miscarriage Association](#) offers support and information to anyone affected by the loss of a baby during pregnancy. They offer a helpline, live chat service and telephone support, support groups as well as lots of information.

[SANDS](#) is charity that provides support to anyone affected by the loss of a baby. They research into the causes of stillbirth and neo-natal death and offer a helpline, local support groups and have a supportive online community.

Maternity or Adoption Leave

Students are entitled Maternity or Adoption Leave if they:

- Give birth to a child, unless as a surrogate (see below);
- Become the primary parent of a child born through surrogacy; or
- Become the primary adopter of a child.

Students are not required to take leave but are encouraged to do so. Those who choose not to take extended leave must not return to their studies earlier than two weeks after the birth.

There are no limits to the number of times that students can take leave.

Postgraduate Research Students should discuss their plans with their Supervisor, including the proposed start date of their leave (which can start at up to 11 weeks before the expected birth date must start at their due date at the latest) and the intended duration of their leave (up to 12 months). Together, the student and Supervisor should explore how the leave can be accommodated within the student's course of study. It is likely that students will need to intermit.

Students are not expected to engage in their studies during intermission but may arrange informal Keeping In Touch days if they wish.

Funded students may be entitled to receive a stipend during leave and should contact their funding administrator about their possible entitlement. Funded Students who receive their stipend during a period of Maternity or Adoption Leave but do not return to their studies at the end of their intermission will be required to repay all or part of the funding received during this period.

Students on a student visa should contact the International Student Office to understand visa implications as there may be restrictions on the amount of leave that they are able to take. The International Student Office can be contacted at International.Students@admin.cam.ac.uk.

Paternity or Partner Leave

Students are entitled to Paternity or Partner Leave if they:

- Become a parent via their partner's pregnancy
- Are the partner of the primary parent of a child born through surrogacy adoption

For these purposes a partner is defined as a person who lives with the birth parent and child in an enduring relationship but is not a parent, sibling, child, aunt or uncle.

They do not have to take a period of leave but should be encouraged to do so. There are no limits to the number of times that students can take leave.

Students may take up to 2 weeks of leave without formal application. Those wishing to take leave of longer than two weeks (up to 12 months) will need to intermit.

Funded students may be entitled to receive a stipend during leave and should contact their funding administrator about their possible entitlement. Funded Students who receive their stipend during a period of leave but do not return to their studies will be required to repay all or part of the funding received during this period.

Students on a student visa should seek advice from the International Student Office as there may be restrictions on the amount of Maternity or Adoption Leave that they are

able to take. The International Student Office can be contacted at International.Students@admin.cam.ac.uk.

Students Acting As Surrogates

Students who act as surrogates may need time to recover from the birth but are not entitled to maternity leave. Those requiring a break of more than two weeks should apply to intermit.

Intermission

Students who wish to take more than two weeks away from their studies during pregnancy or to take maternity or parental/partner leave should apply to intermit. Students can intermit for up to 12 months. Students should submit their application prior to their leave if possible, or as soon as possible after, as applications cannot be backdated further than 30 days.

A student's submission deadline will be adjusted in line with a period of intermission.

Funded students contact their funding administrator before the planned arrival of their child to determine whether they are entitled to receive their stipend for a period of paternity or partner leave and whether there are any associated restrictions.

Returning to Study

Students should be supported with flexibility when returning to study as they learn to balance their studies alongside new family dynamics.

Prior to returning to study, students should meet with their Supervisor to explore whether they need any changes to the way in which they study or if they need any additional support. Students who wish to consider a change in mode of study (e.g. to part-time study) should bear in mind the implications of this in terms of timing, funding (i.e. change of stipend level) and visas. Students on visas should seek advice from the International Student Office about the visa implications of a change to mode of study.

Students should have indicated their intended date of return as part of their application to intermit. Students must inform their Supervisor and Student Registry (student-registry-help@admin.cam.ac.uk). Students on visas should also contact the International Student Office (International.Students@admin.cam.ac.uk).

Non-return/withdrawal

Students who choose not to return to study must inform their Supervisor and formally withdraw from the University via their CamSIS account ([Withdrawal from Study | Cambridge students](#)).

Once withdrawn, students are not able to continue with their studies. There are funding and visa implications on withdrawing from study. Funded students who received a stipend during a period of intermission may be required to repay all or part of the stipend and should contact their funder to confirm requirements. Students on visas are advised to contact the International Student Office to understand the implications of withdrawal from study.

Supporting Student Parents

The University is committed to supporting student parents and offering flexibility to allow them to manage their studies alongside parental responsibilities.

A safe, private and lockable space should be made available for students who breastfeeding and need to express milk, along with refrigerated storage. These facilities should be available for students in both their College and their Department.

Students are expected to organise childcare in a way that allows them to participate fully with their studies. Further support is available from the [University's Childcare Office](#) or [Designated College Childcare Contact](#). Students are not normally permitted to bring a child with them to lectures, labs or supervisions, as there may be health and safety implications for this. In an emergency, students can seek permission from their Department or supervisor for their child(ren) to accompany them but should bear in mind that it may not be possible to grant this permission if there are safety concerns or concerns about the potential disturbance of others.

The University recognises that student parents may have to take time away from their studies to look after their child(ren) at short notice due to sickness. This should be supported and treated with understanding. If a student requires more than two weeks away from study for family reasons they should apply for intermission.

Helpful resources

University resources

The Student Advice Service can be contacted at advice@studentadvice.cam.ac.uk or on 01223 746999 (internal extension 46999).

Students on visas are strongly encouraged to speak to the International Student Office about the visa implications of any leave or change to mode of study. They can be contacted at internationalstudents@admin.cam.ac.uk.

The University's Childcare Office has information about the support that is available for student parents on [their website](#). They can also be contacted at childcareservices@admin.cam.ac.uk.

Outside the University

Adoption UK – Adoption UK is a national charity run by and for adopters, providing self-help information, advice, support and training on all aspects of adoption and adoptive parenting: <https://www.adoptionuk.org/>

Direct Gov – Direct Gov is the UK government's website. It provides information on health, care and benefits during pregnancy, benefits for parents etc: www.direct.gov.uk. The Direct Gov website also provides information on finding and choosing a childcare provider in your local area: www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Childcare.

Family Planning Association – The Family Planning Association's mission is to establish a society in which everyone can make informed choices about sex, relationships and reproduction. Its website contains impartial advice on pregnancy, abortion, adoption and also contains a list of useful organisations: www.fpa.org.uk.

Family and Parenting Institute – The Family and Parenting Institution provides support to parents in bringing up their children and has a range of resources for parents: www.familyandparenting.org.

Marie Stopes – Marie Stopes is the UK's leading provider of sexual and reproductive healthcare services. The services include unplanned pregnancy counselling, termination information and advice etc: www.mariestopes.org.uk/.

Miscarriage Association – The Miscarriage Association offers support and information to anyone affected by the loss of a baby during pregnancy: www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk.

National Union of Students - Provides information and advice to students and students' unions about student finance, rights and welfare. Information for student parents is available on its website, along with research and publications about students with dependent children: www.nus.org.uk.