

Policy on support for pregnant students and students with very young children

Summary:	Policy and implementation guidance for staff and students regarding support for students with pregnancy and parental caring responsibilities
Type:	Policy
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Last modified:	25/1/2019

1. Introduction

This document provides students and staff with information about the University's approach to supporting a student who is pregnant or has decided to terminate a pregnancy. It also provides some information relating to supporting a student who has recently become a parent or is the partner of someone who has a very young child.

The University of Nottingham believes that being or becoming pregnant, terminating a pregnancy or having a very young child should not, in itself, be a barrier to applying for, starting, succeeding in, or completing a programme of study at the University of Nottingham. The University is committed to being as flexible as possible, providing academic standards are upheld. The special arrangements which can and should be made for a student in these circumstances will vary from faculty to faculty, school to school and, indeed, from programme to programme. However, the general approach to be taken in these circumstances is consistent across the University – as is the legal framework in which the University operates.

The policy and associated guidance notes are based on a set of important guiding principles, namely:

- **Taking a flexible approach.** The University recognises its obligations under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975¹ and the Equality Act 2010 and its staff will take a flexible approach to facilitating the continued learning of – and maintaining a high-quality and safe student experience for – a pregnant student, a student who is the parent of a very young child or a student whose partner is in either of these positions. (See Section 5 below for guidance on determining an appropriate degree of flexibility.)
- **Avoiding less favourable treatment.** The University and its staff should avoid treating a student (or applicant) less favourably than other students or applicants on the grounds that they are pregnant or has terminated a pregnancy. Whilst particular arrangements may need to be made for an individual student (for example, a student should not return to University for two weeks after giving birth for health and safety reasons), the University will seek to make sure that such arrangements do not place the student at a particular disadvantage compared to other students.
- **Demonstrating a non-judgmental and sensitive approach.** When supporting and working with a student on these matters, staff should take an open-minded and nonjudgmental approach. Information provided by the student should be treated sensitively and only passed onto others on a need-to-know basis (for example, in order to organise appropriate accommodations for the student relating to learning and teaching, assessment, placements, fees etc.).
- **Enabling informed choices.** Members of staff should not attempt to direct or unduly influence a student's decisions. Their role is to provide context and advice to the student, and to explore, in consultation with the student and others, flexibility that can be applied to the student's programme or period of study to provide appropriate support.

2. Does a student need to notify their School/Faculty of their pregnancy?

Students are not under any obligation to inform their School/Faculty if they become pregnant, have a child, or decide to terminate a pregnancy whilst they are a student here. However, it is important to note that a School/Faculty will not be able to take a flexible approach to the programme of study, or provide specific support to the student, unless it knows about the situation. If requested, the School/Faculty will identify an appropriate member of staff to discuss such support needs.

Whilst making a decision on whether or not to inform their School/Faculty, students are encouraged to consider the following:

- There may be elements of a programme of study that could present a health and safety risk to a pregnant student and/or their child. A student's School/Faculty will not be able to arrange appropriate risk assessments unless it is aware of the pregnancyⁱⁱ.
- If a student's pregnancy-related absence (for example, for antenatal appointments) impacts significantly on the student's studies, the School/Faculty will only be able to take proper account of the reasons for absence if they are notified of theseⁱⁱⁱ.
- In some cases, a student's pregnancy-related absence from University might be something that needs to be discussed with other organisations. For example, if a postgraduate research student is in receipt of a University or Departmental Scholarship or funding from a Research Council or other external body, they should refer to the terms and conditions relating to their award. The student will generally be required to notify their supervisor and in some cases a relevant Suspension of Study or Extenuating Circumstances form will have to be completed, supported by a MATB1 certificate or doctor's letter.
- Sometimes, the absence of a student from University can adversely affect the work of other students they are working alongside (for example, on a group project or in a research team). Where this is the case it is important to notify the School/Faculty so that plans can be made to deal with any such issues arising from the absence.

Various sources of advice and support are available to students, whether or not they decide to notify their School/Faculty of their circumstances.

Note for International Students: If an international student requires a Visa to remain in the UK during their period of study and their pregnancy is likely to result in the need to remain in the UK longer than planned, or if an international student is considering temporary suspension from their course of study, then immigration advice should be sought from the Visa and Immigration support team in Student Services: <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/student-services/services/visa-immigration.aspx>

3. What process should be followed for a student and their School/Faculty to discuss the impact that the student's pregnancy or childcare responsibilities may have on their studies?

This section outlines a series of steps for students and staff to follow in order to discuss and respond to the requirements of an individual student who is pregnant. In addition to the below, a flowchart in appendix A of this document details these steps in a visual format.

Step 1: A student is strongly advised to consult the University Health Centre or their GP to discuss medical issues relating to their pregnancy prior to approaching their School. It is particularly important to take advice at an early stage if there is any possible health and safety risk.

Since the focus of this 7-step process is on considering the implications of pregnancy on the student's programme of study and academic work, students are also reminded that they can, at any stage, contact other sources of non-academic advice and support (including the University Counselling Service, Students' Union Advice, the Chaplaincy, and the University Safety Office).

Step 2: A pregnant student has the right to request a meeting with their personal tutor, research supervisor, or other trusted staff member. Some Schools may choose to identify another member of staff such as the school welfare manager/officer for students to contact to discuss these issues. Schools must publicise the appropriate point of contact to all students – e.g. on its website and in School handbooks. If so requested, the School will identify a female member of staff to discuss the implications for the continuation of their study.

The student and the relevant staff member must meet to discuss and agree a plan for their continuation of study. Whenever possible, the member of staff should contact the student within 5 working days of the request being received from the student and meet them as soon as possible thereafter. It will also be important for the student to consult with financial support regarding any student loan or award funding implications.

At the meeting, it is essential that urgent consideration is given to undertaking a risk assessment (see Step 3 below). In addition, careful consideration must be given to the variety of ways in which the student can be enabled to continue their studies during their pregnancy or after the birth. For example, these might include:

- agreeing periods of absence and making arrangements for the student to catch-up on lectures/tutorials missed for pregnancy/birth related reasons to ensure that they are not at an academic disadvantage;
- adjusting timescales/deadlines for assessed coursework deadlines if the pregnancy or birth prevents compliance;
- Seeking approval, as appropriate, from the School for alternative means of assessment for the student (for example, a written assessment instead of a physical performance if possible) if the pregnancy or birth prevents the normal methods of assessment;
- allowing the student first attempt re-sits at future examination periods, for example in a situation in which the pregnancy or birth prevents the student from taking an examination at the normal time for their programme of study;
- consideration of a transfer to part-time study;
- agreeing for the student taking some time out from their studies if this is felt to be the most appropriate route forward. This would involve the student following the voluntary interruption of study procedure. The period of temporary suspension may be extended if the time required to complete the programme of study will still fall within the maximum time limit allowed for the programme either by the University (and/or, where applicable, professional bodies). Where necessary a student can be referred to University Occupational Health for guidance.

As well as covering the student's longer-term plans relating to their studies, the continuation of study plan should also:

- accommodate the student's antenatal care, include a break from attending University of at least two weeks after giving birth for health and safety reasons, and
- include provision for re-integrating the student to the programme of study on return from any prolonged absence.

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The staff member overseeing the support arrangements should refer to the guidance below when considering what flexibility might be appropriate in any given situation.

Where a student decides that they would like to voluntarily interrupt their studies, they should follow the procedure as laid out in the Quality Manual. This can be found here: <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/academicservices/qualitymanual/registrationattendanceandstudy/voluntary-interruption-of-study.aspx>

The student is responsible for checking the implications of a suspension of study with their scholarship awarding body or provider (if applicable) at an early stage. For students funded by a Research Council, or on a University Research Scholarship, advice is available from the Graduate School. The student is also responsible for ensuring that the suspension of studies will not prevent them from completing their studies within an absolute maximum time period from initial registration as outlined in that policy:

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/academicservices/qualitymanual/registrationattendanceandstudy/maximum-period-from-initial-registration.aspx>

Step 3: The member of staff overseeing the support arrangements for the student (e.g. the personal tutor, research supervisor, or other designated person) should ensure that appropriate steps are taken in relation to health and safety issues. In most cases, this will involve a risk assessment for the individual student. Advice can be sought from the School Safety Officer and/or the University Safety Office.

For some students – for example, those participating in field trips, studying a laboratory-based subject, working with equipment which poses a danger to the health of the pregnant student or their foetus (e.g. equipment producing radiation), or taking a programme of study which involves high levels of physical activity – it will be even more important that the health and safety implications of pregnancy are given serious consideration. In these situations, staff should seek advice as soon as possible from the School/Faculty Officer and/or University Safety Office and a full risk assessment should be completed. (Whilst it is aimed at responding to the needs of pregnant employees rather than pregnant students, provides some helpful information on relevant health and safety issues.)

If it is not practicable to alter the study conditions to respond to the risk(s) highlighted by this assessment, or if such an alteration would not avoid any identified risk(s), the student may need to take time out from their study to ensure they avoid these risks. However, a concerted effort should be made by the School/Faculty to manage the health and safety risks and find alternative ways of allowing a student to continue their course in any situation where a temporary suspension is not in line with the student's wishes.

Step 4: The student should explore with Student Services any potential impact that the flexibility proposed may have in terms of payment of their tuition fees or registration. Information on fee payments can be found here:

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/student-services/services/fees.aspx>

As referenced in Step 2, students should also be aware that if they are in receipt of a bursary or scholarship, they must also discuss the implications of any absence with the funding body.

As with Step 1, students are reminded that they can, at any stage, contact other sources of non-academic advice and support (including the University Counselling Service, Students' Union Advice, the Chaplaincy, and the University Safety Office).

Step 5: Once discussed and agreed, a written plan for the student's continuation of study (detailing any specific flexibility agreed to allow the student to continue their studies) should be sent by the School/Faculty to the student. Where possible, written agreement to this plan should be sought from the student. Student Services can be contacted for further advice if necessary.

Where a student is dissatisfied with the degree of flexibility offered, they may ask their School/Faculty for information about the local complaints procedures or make a formal complaint, if appropriate, in line with the Student Complaints Procedure. If there is doubt staff can contact Student Services for advice and guidance:

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/academic-services/qualitymanual/student-engagement-and-complaints/student-complaints-policy.aspx>

Step 6: The member of staff overseeing the support arrangements should communicate the agreed continuation plan to the Personal Tutor/Research Supervisor and other relevant teaching staff and/or examination boards, as appropriate. Information should be passed on sensitively and in line with data handling procedures.

Step 7: The student and their personal tutor, research supervisor, or other designated staff member should monitor the situation on an ongoing basis, particularly to assess the effectiveness of any special arrangements that have been agreed to facilitate the student's continued study. The student can request further meetings with their School/Faculty, particularly if they are experiencing any difficulties with their academic work as a result of these arrangements.

4. How should a School determine an appropriate degree of flexibility?

It is not possible to provide a definitive list of special arrangements that might be considered reasonable in every possible situation because the decisions about which arrangements are appropriate in each particular case will vary according to a wide range of factors. These factors include the student's individual circumstances, the time of year, the structure and content of the particular programme of study, restrictions imposed by professional bodies and any related health and safety matters.

Staff members are advised to take into account the following when considering what might be appropriate in a given case:

- A student's own views on their options are very important and it is vital that staff consult openly with the student on their way forward, rather than seeking to implement a predetermined set of adjustments.
- At the same time, it is important to note that Schools/Faculties do not have to agree to any or all requests made by the student. There may be some situations in which it is impossible or unreasonable for a School/Faculty to agree to a particular request.
- To ensure best practice, and avoid any inadvertent discrimination, a School/Faculty should not normally decline a request from a pregnant student for particular special arrangements solely on grounds that they are too costly to implement (although this may be one factor taken into account when deciding on the overall reasonableness of meeting the request).
- If a School/Faculty decides to decline a flexibility request from a pregnant student, it is considered good practice for the School/Faculty to document its reasons for refusing the request and discuss with the student why this particular request is not considered "reasonable" in the particular circumstances.
- In cases where deferring studies would lead to a student taking longer to complete a degree programme than would normally be permissible, the School/Faculty may decline a request for further time out from studies (in order to ensure that the information gained in previous parts of the programme remains current enough to count towards the qualification in question). However, in these circumstances the School/Faculty should still strive to demonstrate a flexible approach, where practicable, in relation to this deadline for programme completion, whilst ensuring that the student does not exceed the overall time limit allowed for their programme of study by the University or a relevant professional body.
- In some cases, it might be appropriate for a School/Faculty to show flexibility in relation to which modules count towards a particular qualification to accommodate a pregnant student, providing academic standards are upheld. In such circumstances normal procedures would need to be followed in terms of gaining approval for such changes e.g. via the School/Faculty or University's Quality and Standards Committee. In some situations, however, such flexibility could lead to a student missing a piece of work or module which is required for professional or vocational accreditation. Care should, therefore, be taken to check that any missed work will not adversely affect the accreditation of the student or, at the very least, the student should be made aware of the potential impact in terms of their future employability.

5. What advice is available on Study Abroad and Work Placements?

For students who become pregnant before or during a period of study abroad or a work placement there may be circumstances where the University is limited in the support it can realistically offer to the student. Where this is judged to present a particular risk to the student or their unborn child, they may be strongly advised to take time out or transfer to a different programme of study.

If a student becomes pregnant before, or during a period of study abroad, advice may be taken from the Study Abroad team in the Office for Global Engagement.

If a student becomes pregnant before, or during a work placement, advice should be sought from their School/Faculty Work Placement Support Tutor.

6. What support is available to staff members to help them to advise, or take a flexible approach to, a pregnant student?

Advice on adjustments to Exam arrangements for pregnant students or students with very young children may be sought from the Examinations team in Student Services.

<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/academicservices/currentstudents/examinations/index.aspx>

Advice on health and safety issues relating to pregnant students may be sought from a School/Faculty Safety Officer and/or University Safety Office. The University's HR department provide a link to the HSE guidance: www.hse.gov.uk/mothers/faqs.htm

7. What support is available for a student whose partner is pregnant?

In most cases, full-time and part-time programmes are likely to be flexible enough to enable a student whose partner is pregnant, or whose partner is about to adopt a child, to take occasional breaks – perhaps to attend antenatal appointments with their partner and/or take some time to be with their partner around the time of the birth or adoption. All requests of this sort need to take into account the Regulations Governing Attendance and Engagement outlined within the Quality manual:

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/academicservices/qualitymanual/registrationattendanceandstudy/regulations-governing-attendance-and-engagement.aspx>

However, sometimes a student whose partner is pregnant or about to adopt may still wish to discuss this with their School/Faculty (normally their personal tutor/research supervisor) – especially if they feel that this may significantly affect their studies. In these circumstances, staff members are encouraged to demonstrate a degree of flexibility in terms of responding to the student's circumstances – although such flexibility is only likely to extend to an occasional agreed absence.

Some funding bodies may allow a period of time for paternity leave. Students should refer to the terms and conditions relating to their award.

8. What support and facilities are available for a student who has recently become a parent?

Whilst the procedure proposed in this policy and guidance relates to a student during pregnancy, this also provides a helpful model for considering flexibility for a student who has recently become a parent. As above, what constitutes a reasonable degree of flexibility to take account of a student's caring/parental responsibilities will vary from Faculty to Faculty and from programme to programme

There are also sources of practical support available, administered by either the University or Students' Union, to assist parents with the costs associated with studying at this University. Advice on benefits, funding, and other money matter is also available from SU Advice.

9. Adoption

Students who have been matched for adoption should inform their personal tutor, research supervisor or other trusted staff member (such as school welfare officer/manager). If the student is the primary adopter, a plan should be developed in line with the guidance in this document. If the student's partner is the primary adopter, upon formal adoption of the child, the student should be allowed time off from studies in line with the advice in the sections above on paternity-related absence.

If a student has a stipend, NHS bursary or research council funding, they are likely to be allowed a period of paid adoption leave. Students should be advised to familiarise themselves with the terms and conditions of their award.

10. Childcare whilst on campus

Students should not normally bring their child with them into any public teaching areas – such as lecture theatres, seminar or teaching rooms – and so they will need to make arrangements for the care of their child whilst they are in these locations.

Students may be accompanied by children in general public areas providing that their children are supervised at all times in accordance with the guidance given by the University Safety Office. It is particularly important that children are not brought into areas where there is the possibility of a risk to health and safety. The University of Nottingham cannot accept any liability for the child in these circumstances.

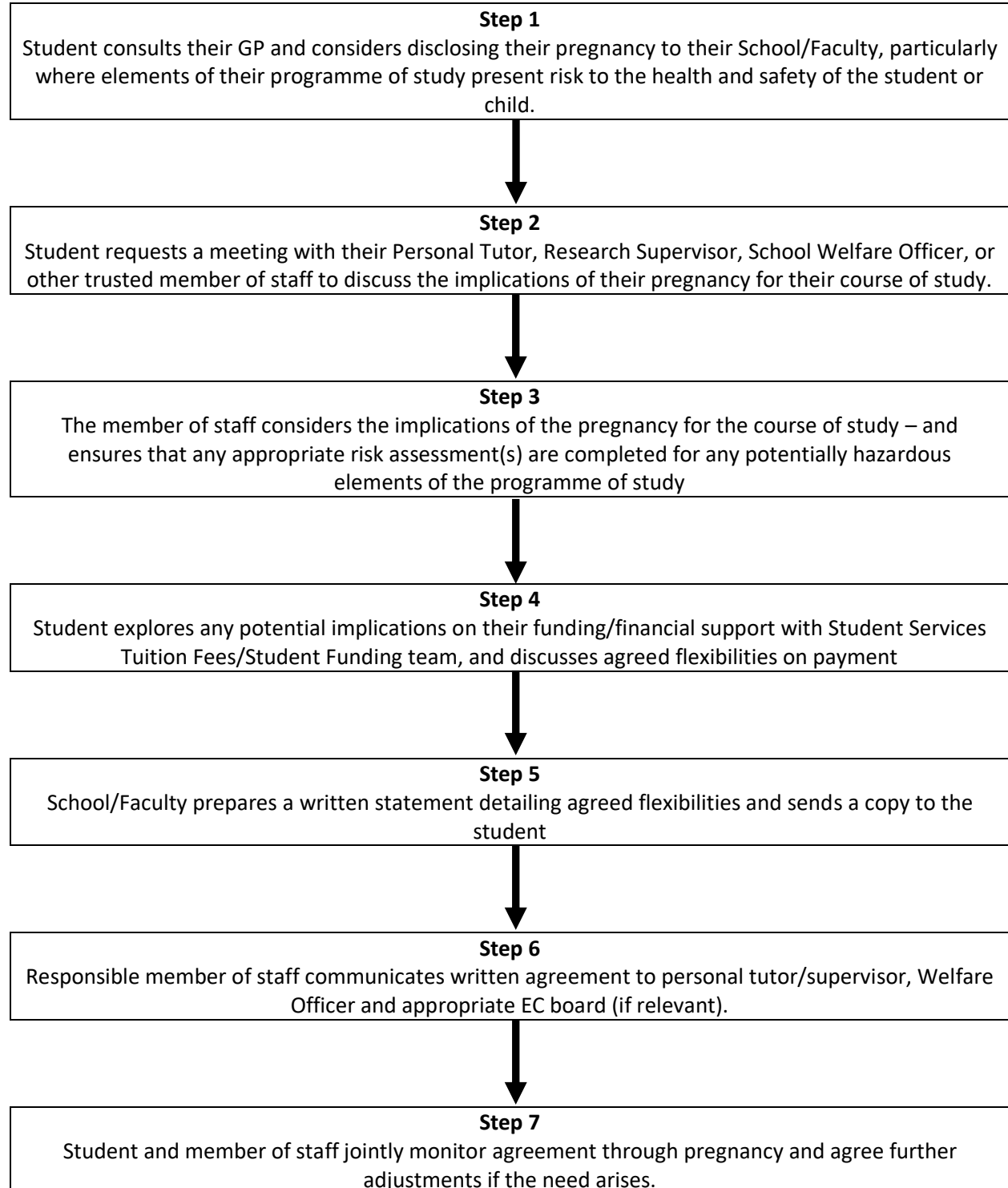
There are no restrictions on feeding (bottle feeding or breastfeeding) at the University. In addition there are designated Athena SWAN Parenting Rooms across the University's campus locations. These rooms are intended to provide a private, hygienic, safe and secure area for breastfeeding staff and students to express and store breastmilk or to feed their baby. Developed in response to Athena SWAN Focus Groups, the rooms are designated spaces for those who prefer to breastfeed or express breast milk in a private location. However, we want all parents to feel comfortable to breastfeed anywhere.

11. University Accommodation

The University has a small number of flats suitable for family accommodation, although there is generally a waiting list for these. For more information, students should contact Accommodation Services.

Some University accommodation will be unsuitable for children, or may, in some circumstances, be difficult for someone in the later stages of pregnancy to access. If a student wishes to discuss such issues, they should approach the relevant Warden or Accommodation Services in the first instance. Pregnant students may also consider disclosing their pregnancy to the relevant Warden if they are concerned that they may need support in an emergency situation, such as early labour or miscarriage.

Appendix A – Flowchart



Appendix B – Summary of Key Responsibilities

The University will ensure that:

- Any student who becomes pregnant before or during a period of study at the University is accommodated as far as practicable to allow them to complete their programme of study, providing academic standards are upheld
- Relevant staff are made aware of the terms of this policy and their responsibilities arising under it through sharing to appropriate colleagues on a bi-annual basis.
- Support and guidance is available for staff undertaking risk assessments on elements of the programme of study that are likely to result in a risk to the health and safety of the student or unborn child where appropriate a student can be referred to Occupational Health for guidance.
- Staff from appropriate teams (Student Services, Safety Office, SU Advice, etc) are available to discuss with staff the best way to support the continuing study of a pregnant student to ensure they are able to complete their programme of study
- Appropriate support is available to students through various support services
- The policy is kept under review and updated on a bi-annual basis

Schools and faculties will ensure that:

- The policy is available to staff and students, sharing appropriate guidance materials via personal tutors and school welfare staff
- Staff are aware of the policy so that they can respond appropriately when a student discloses their pregnancy and seeks support to continue their programme of study
- As soon as a student discloses that they are pregnant, a risk assessment, or series of risk assessments, are undertaken to ensure that there are no elements of the programme of study that present a risk to the health and safety of the student or the unborn child
- Wherever practicable, accommodation is made to ensure that a pregnant student, or student with a very young child, is able to complete their programme of study
- If requested, a female member of staff is identified with whom a pregnant student can discuss their support needs
- The student is given information on other sources of advice/support that are available

Individual staff members

All individual staff members are advised to:

- Familiarise themselves with this document and the University's responsibilities towards students who are pregnant or have very young children

Individual staff members to whom a pregnancy is disclosed are responsible for:

- Reading the Policy and this document and, in particular, becoming familiar with the procedure for supporting pregnant students
- Treating any disclosure of a pregnancy seriously and making students aware of appropriate sources of support
- Respecting a student's right to confidentiality and verifying that a student has no objections to their pregnancy being discussed with others – particularly when information needs to be passed on to other staff members to arrange any agreed accommodations to the programme of study or adjustments to fees.
- Ensuring accurate information is given to prospective students regarding the availability of support for students who are pregnant or have very young children

- Seeking advice from colleagues or central support services within the University if they are unsure of how best to support the continued study of a pregnant student

Students and applicants

Students and applicants covered by this policy are responsible for:

- Disclosing their pregnancy to a trusted member of staff within their Department, School or Faculty at an early stage of their pregnancy, with a view to discussing any necessary support arrangements or adjustments – particularly where elements of their programme of study might present a health and safety hazard to the student or unborn child (see Section 2)
- Ensuring the safe supervision of any child they may bring onto campus

Students and applicants covered by this policy are advised to:

- Read the policy and associated guidance notes in order to understand the University's approach to supporting pregnant students and students with very young children
- Ensure that they have a clear idea of what will be expected of them on their course of study in order to understand the potential impact of pregnancy related absence
- Discuss any concerns they have relating to their pregnancy with the University of Nottingham Health Centres or their own GP and, if required, staff in one or more of the following services: the Students' Union Advice, University Counselling Service, Safety Office, Accommodation Services and the Chaplaincy)

ⁱ The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 prohibits organisations, including the University, from treating a person (including a student, staff member or visitor) less favourably than others on the grounds of sex. Discrimination on the grounds that a student is pregnant can constitute unlawful sex discrimination. The University is also placed, by the Equality Act 2006 and 2010, under a statutory duty to promote equality between women and men and to not discriminate on grounds of any protected characteristic. These guidelines have been drafted with these legal obligations in mind.

ⁱⁱ It is important to point out that, in the case of students with a potential exposure to hazardous radiation or chemicals, the greatest risk to the health of an embryo or foetus arises within the first 13 weeks of pregnancy. Students in these circumstances are strongly advised to inform their School of their pregnancy in order to allow a risk assessment to be undertaken.

ⁱⁱⁱ In the case of pre-arranged antenatal appointments, the School/Faculty would normally need to be notified of these in advance in order to take these into account.