

University Policy on Student Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Leave

These policies aim to create an improved framework for student parents' interactions with the University in relation to data collection, defining entitlement to parental leave, arrangements for return to study, and access to University graduate accommodation and childcare services.

The policy framework shall be taken to come into effect from the date of its publication on the Student Gateway website on 17 June 2011. Postgraduate students currently suspended from study to take parental leave may not make retrospective requests for their leave to be recalculated under the new arrangements. If they have already taken the six terms of leave their board may allow and have taken parental leave they may, if required, apply via their colleges to the Education Committee for permission to suspend their studies for a further period.

The remaining provisions of the policy framework shall be taken to apply to students who are currently taking parental leave.

The agreed policy statements have been numbered and enclosed in boxes. Prefatory material has been included where this was thought to be helpful. Further information is available on request from Sara Smith at Education Policy Support (sara.smith@admin.ox.ac.uk; (2)80418).

THE ROLE OF THE COLLEGES

This policy framework does not seek to prescribe college policies towards students, though there are several areas in which student parents' interests will best be met by coordinated action by both the University and the College. It is anticipated that the main areas of impact on colleges would include:

- Advising students on the timing of leave and assisting them to make applications for suspension of study;
- Preparing for return to study (in the case of graduates, in cooperation with the appropriate department or faculty);
- Advising students on possible adjustments to mode of study;

It would be advisable for colleges to draw up their own policies on maternity leave to ensure consistency of practice in relation to access to college premises and facilities (Nuffield College's policy on student maternity leave might provide a useful template).

It is not proposed that policies relating to university graduate accommodation should be extended to college accommodation.

1. COLLECTING INFORMATION AT REGISTRATION

Collecting information on students' dependants will help the University to fulfil its responsibilities in relation to gathering equality data; monitoring the adequacy of its support mechanisms; and targeting student parents with relevant information and advice. The NUS Student Parent Project published a report in 2009 ([Meet the Parents: the experience of students with children in further and higher education](#)) recommending that universities actively collect information on student parents.

1.1 Students will be asked to state during the annual registration process whether they have any dependants under the age of 18. This requirement is being incorporated into the design specification for the replacement student system which will be introduced in 2013.

1.2 The University will use the information collected at registration to inform student parents of the provision offered to them across the collegiate University, including OUSU's Student Parents Committee, mailing list and regular social events (e.g. Tea and Toys).

2. MATERNITY LEAVE

The University's policy is intended to harmonise with the frameworks operated by the Research Councils, enabling it clearly to differentiate maternity leave from suspension of study for medical or disciplinary reasons and to ensure consistent and fair treatment of pregnant students and new mothers. It also provides new mothers with the right to a protected period of leave after the birth.

Same sex couples

2.1 In cases which do not fall under the arrangements for adoption leave set out in section 5 below, the woman who gives birth to the child will be eligible to take maternity leave while her partner will be eligible to take paternity leave.

Undergraduate and postgraduate taught students

2.2 Students who give birth may choose to suspend their status, normally for no less than one year, before recommencing their studies. Where possible the leave period should be timed to take account of the academic requirements of the course (e.g. project work), and should commence at the end of rather than partway through a term. The policies described in 2.9 – 2.13 relating to access to University services and arrangements for return to study will also apply to undergraduate and postgraduate taught students. Maternity leave will be taken under current college arrangements for suspension of study. Postgraduate students should also submit an application for suspension of status (see 2.5 below).

Postgraduate research students

Maternity leave

2.3 Women students who give birth during their period of registration for a postgraduate research degree are automatically entitled to suspend their studies for up to 3 terms (1 year) of maternity leave. This period of leave is considered separately from the 6 terms of suspension that their faculty or departmental board may allow, and no special application to

Education Committee is required. Terms of maternity leave must be taken consecutively and any unused terms may not be taken at a later date. Women who have been granted 6 terms' suspension of study by their board and who have taken additional maternity leave shall not be prohibited from seeking dispensation from Education Committee for further suspension of study. Such requests will be considered on their individual merits.

2.4 Students who hold Research Council or other sponsoring body awards must align their periods of University and funding body leave. Where there is a conflict of interest between the two policies, the sponsoring body's policy will be followed in relation to the area(s) of conflict.

2.5 Students should notify their college, supervisor and Director of Graduate Studies of their pregnancy (via the MATB1 form, available from a midwife) no later than the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth. Earlier notification may be necessary in some cases, for example where a student works in a potentially hazardous environment. Students should apply for maternity, extended paternity or adoption leave on a variant of form GSO 17 (Application for suspension of status) which has been drawn up for this purpose. The timing of maternity leave will depend on a number of factors, including term dates and the nature of the student's research work. It is usual for leave not to commence before the 29th week of pregnancy. New mothers must not return to work earlier than 2 weeks after the baby's birth.

2.6 Risk assessments must be made where the work environment (e.g. laboratory, clinical) might pose a threat to a pregnant woman. The University Occupational Health Service (UOHS) recommends that departments seek advice from their Departmental Safety Officer, the Area Safety Officer or the Safety Office. The OUHS can also assist with health queries relating to pregnancy and breastfeeding at work. This may require a consultation with a doctor or nurse and a visit to the workplace. (Email enquiries@uohs.ox.ac.uk.)

2.7 The relevant Graduate Studies Assistant will update the student's OSS record to indicate that maternity leave will be taken and adjust the completion date accordingly. Students may take up to 3 consecutive terms of maternity leave. Such leave is calculated separately from the 6 terms of ordinary suspension of study faculties and departments may permit. The GSA will also notify Student Data Management and Analysis of any necessary fee amendments.

2.8 Suspensions of study are recorded on OSS as commencing at the start of the relevant term and concluding at the end of the subsequent vacation. As far as possible, students should align their maternity leave with the tripartite structure of university terms. If a student is obliged to suspend mid-term (e.g. for medical reasons), the date of suspension will usually be backdated to the start of term. A short period of exceptional suspension may be considered (as a dispensation from the regulations relating to suspension of study) where the expected date of childbirth falls during the Long Vacation and there are concerns about the impact on the student's submission date. (This might be the case where a student wishes to take a short period of maternity leave over the summer then return to study in Michaelmas term.) The relevant Graduate Studies Assistants will forward applications to the Secretary of the Education Committee.

Access to University facilities

2.9 Both undergraduate and postgraduate students on maternity leave will retain their university cards and access to their university email accounts, the university's electronic resources, and university libraries. Under current arrangements, suspended students are not normally supposed to be studying, and are not entitled to teaching, supervision and other academic provision (e.g. thesis chapter reading), or access to laboratories.

2.10 The terms of a general policy on access to university and college facilities for students suspended for non-disciplinary reasons are currently under consideration by the collegiate university.

Planning for return to study

2.11 Undergraduate and postgraduate students on maternity leave should be encouraged by their college or department to maintain occasional contact with their tutor and/or supervisor so that arrangements may be made for their return to study. This is likely to involve a limited amount of academic guidance and preparation, as necessary in each case.

2.12 Timely arrangements should be made to facilitate students' return to study after maternity leave, including a full assessment of their requirements in relation to e.g. training, updating, monitoring and additional learning support. Typically this assessment would be carried out by a college tutor, supervisor or other relevant academic staff.

2.13 Risk assessments must also be made where the work environment might pose a threat to a breastfeeding mother (see 2.6 above).

2.14 If ill-health prevents a postgraduate student from returning to work after completing her maximum period of maternity leave, this should be treated as sickness absence and notified accordingly (i.e. to the funding body). Students may be required to extend their period of suspension. If a student is unable to return to work due to the illness of her child, she should seek further suspension of study, if necessary by application to the Education Committee.

Overseas students

2.15 Under the terms of the student visa, overseas students who interrupt their studies will need to obtain an extension to their visa, and may be required to return to their home countries while suspended from study. Students should consult the International Student Advisory Service for advice on immigration and visas (email student.immigration@admin.ox.ac.uk).

Paid maternity leave (postgraduate students)

2.16 The University aspires to provide a limited period of funded maternity leave for holders of all studentships funded or co-funded by the University, although currently this provision is available only to holders of Clarendon Awards (see the [Clarendon Fund FAQs webpage](#) for further details).

2.17 Provision for funded maternity leave should therefore be included in the fund-raising for and design of University studentships.

3. ADJUSTMENTS TO MODE OF STUDY

Although very few of the University's programmes of study currently offer students the option to read for a degree on a part-time basis, this policy provides an opportunity for student mothers returning to study after the birth of a child to apply for permission to alter their mode of study, usually for a limited period. The University has considered whether its policies on mode of study may have an adverse impact on student mothers' access to study and progression therein, particularly in light of the new Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act, 2010), which reinforces existing equality duties in relation to gender, disability and race. The Duty requires institutions to have 'due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity'; to take steps to meet protected groups' particular needs; and to attempt to remove disadvantages that are connected to a protected characteristic. These characteristics include gender, pregnancy and maternity.

The University has agreed that in some cases, students might benefit from a period of flexible study to allow them to stage their return to full-time study. It is hoped that this will mitigate the disadvantages new mothers may experience if they are unable to study full-time upon their return from maternity leave.

Undergraduate students

3.1 Some undergraduate students returning to study after the birth of a child may find it difficult to pursue their course at the normal pace. Under such circumstances it may be possible to extend the duration of their studies, typically by studying the Final Honour School over one additional year. Such a proposal requires endorsement from both the College and the faculty or department. The student's College can then apply to Education Committee to request dispensation from the examination regulations concerning overstanding for honours, the timing of multi-part examinations, or if it is proposed to split Finals over two years. Approval for the extension of study will also have to be obtained from Student Finance England or the relevant regional body. Applications for remission of the additional year's university fees can be considered by the Fees Panel on a case-by-case basis.

Postgraduate taught students

3.2 It is not feasible to study the majority of postgraduate taught courses on a part-time basis. If postgraduate students returning to study after the birth of a child encounter difficulties, faculties and departments should consider what alternative measures of support they might implement, e.g. agreed extensions to submission deadlines. However, in some cases the faculty or department may consider that it would be feasible for a student to complete the outstanding elements of a taught course – such as the dissertation – on a part-time basis. If the student's College endorses this proposal, it may make an application to Education Committee on the student's behalf to request dispensation from the relevant examination regulations. Dispensation from the regulations to transfer from full-time to part-time status for the limited period involved will be considered provided that the student's faculty or department supports the request and can demonstrate that her educational and pastoral needs will be met appropriately. Where necessary, approval must also be granted by the student's funding body, and visa requirements must be met (overseas students must be studying for at least 15 hours per week). Where permission has been granted, students

will be charged fees at the part-time rate. This is particularly relevant in the case of one-year master's courses, where fee liability extends for six terms.

Postgraduate research students

3.3 If a postgraduate research student returning to study after the birth of a child seeks permission to study on a part-time basis, it would be reasonable to consider the possibility of adjusting her mode of study. If it is agreed that the course can successfully be studied on a part-time basis, and the proposal is endorsed by both the College and the faculty or department, the student's College may apply to Education Committee for dispensation from the relevant examination regulations. Dispensation from the regulations to transfer from full-time to part-time status will be considered provided that the student's faculty or department supports the request and can demonstrate that her educational and pastoral needs will be met appropriately. In the first instance, permission will be granted to transfer to part-time status for a limited period of no longer than three terms to ensure timely review of the student's progress. Where necessary, approval must also be granted by the student's funding body, and visa requirements must be met. Where permission has been granted, students will be charged fees at the part-time rate and their thesis submission deadlines will be recalculated. The faculty or department will review the student's progress no later than three terms after her return to study, at which point a decision will be made on whether to transfer her back to full-time study or to continue on a part-time basis. (N.B. Some Research Council-funded students are not allowed to alter their mode of study more than once.) Neither course of action will require a further application to Education Committee.

4. PATERNITY LEAVE

Same sex couples

4.1 In cases which do not fall under the arrangements for adoption leave set out in section 5.1 below, the woman who gives birth to the child will be eligible to take maternity leave while her partner will be eligible to take paternity leave. (In this section, the term 'father' refers to the member of the couple who takes paternity leave.)

Undergraduate and postgraduate taught students

4.2 Student fathers are permitted to take 2 weeks' (10 working days) leave either at the time or within 3 months of the birth. This will not entail dispensation to miss exams. Students will also be eligible for a longer period of suspension, in line with the arrangements made for student mothers. This will normally last one full year so that the student may recommence his studies at the same point at which he suspended. The possibility of additional fee liability should be taken into account. If students wish to take up to 2 weeks of paternity leave during term time, departments and colleges may be able to assist them to make up lost time.

Postgraduate research students

4.3 Postgraduate research student fathers are permitted to take 2 weeks' (10 working days) leave either at the time or within 3 months of the birth. In line with the policy adopted by the research councils, this leave is not taken as a suspension of study and the submission date is not adjusted.

4.4 Students who are eligible for a further period of paternity leave from their research council or sponsor may request a matching period of leave from the University. The University will support student fathers' requests for a period of suspension where permitted by their funding body, up to a usual maximum of 3 consecutive terms (1 year). Where there is a conflict of interest between the two policies, the sponsoring body's policy will be followed in relation to the area(s) of conflict. Additional leave will be awarded as a suspension from study over and above the 6 terms their faculty or departmental board may allow, and must be taken within the first 12 months of the child's life. The submission date will be adjusted accordingly. No special application to Education Committee is required. If a father chooses to suspend his studies for fewer than 3 terms, the unused portion may not be taken at a later date. However, fathers who have been granted 6 terms' suspension of study by their board and who have taken additional paternity leave shall not be prohibited from seeking dispensation from Education Committee for further suspension of study, where permitted by their funding body. Such requests will be considered on their individual merits.

4.5 Self-funded student fathers will be permitted to take 2 weeks' (10 working days) leave either at the time or within 3 months of the birth of their child. This is not taken as a suspension of study and the submission date is not adjusted. In addition to this, the University will support student fathers' requests for a further period of leave of up to 3 consecutive terms (1 year). Additional leave will be awarded as a suspension from study over and above the 6 terms their faculty or departmental board may allow, and must be taken within the first 12 months of the child's life. The submission date will be adjusted accordingly. No special application to Education Committee is required. If a father chooses to suspend his studies for fewer than 3 terms, the unused portion may not be taken at a later date. However, fathers who have been granted 6 terms' suspension of study by their board and who have taken additional paternity leave shall not be prohibited from seeking dispensation from Education Committee for further suspension of study. Such requests will be considered on their individual merits.

4.6 The timing of extended paternity leave will depend on a number of factors, including term dates and the nature of the student's research work. Suspensions of study are recorded on OSS as commencing at the start of the relevant term and concluding at the end of the subsequent vacation, so students should as far as possible align their paternity leave with the tripartite structure of university terms. Applications for extended paternity leave should be made on the variant of form GSO 17 (Application for suspension of status) which has been drawn up for this purpose. The relevant Graduate Studies Assistant will update the student's OSS record to indicate that extended paternity leave will be taken and adjust the completion date accordingly.

5. ADOPTION LEAVE

In drawing up comprehensive policies for maternity and paternity leave, the University would not wish to treat adoptive and biological parents unequally. It is customary for arrangements for adoption leave to parallel those made for maternity and paternity leave, in that the main carer takes 'maternity leave', regardless of gender, and the carer's partner takes 'paternity' leave.

5.1 The child's main carer will be eligible to take up to 3 consecutive terms' (1 year) leave in line with maternity leave provisions. Adoption leave may commence at any point after the student has been notified that s/he has been matched with a child.

5.2 A student who is the partner of an adopting parent will be eligible for leave in line with the relevant model for paternity leave. For postgraduate research students this includes the possibility of suspension for up to 3 consecutive terms (1 year) over and above the 6 terms their faculty or departmental board may allow. If a student chooses to suspend his or her studies for fewer than 3 terms, the unused portion may not be taken at a later date. However, adoptive parents who have been granted 6 terms' suspension of study by their board and who have taken additional adoption leave shall not be prohibited from seeking dispensation from Education Committee for further suspension of study. Such requests will be considered on their individual merits.

5.3 Postgraduate research students who are eligible for a period of adoption leave from their research council or sponsor may request a matching period of leave from the University, up to a usual maximum of 3 consecutive terms (1 year). Where there is a conflict of interest between the two policies, the sponsoring body's policy will be followed in relation to the area(s) of conflict. Additional leave will be awarded as a suspension from study over and above the 6 terms their faculty or departmental board may allow, and must be taken within the first 12 months after adoption. The submission date will be adjusted accordingly. Adoptive parents who have been granted 6 terms' suspension of study by their board and who have taken additional adoption leave shall not be prohibited from seeking dispensation from Education Committee for further suspension of study. Such requests will be considered on their individual merits.

5.4 The timing of adoption leave will depend on a number of factors, including term dates and the nature of the student's research work. Suspensions of study are recorded on OSS as commencing at the start of the relevant term and concluding at the end of the subsequent vacation, so students should as far as possible align their adoption leave with the tripartite structure of university terms. Applications for adoption leave should be made on the variant of form GSO 17 (Application for suspension of status) which has been drawn up for this purpose. The relevant Graduate Studies Assistant will update the student's OSS record to indicate that adoption leave will be taken and adjust the completion date accordingly.

6. ACCOMMODATION FOR POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

All matriculated postgraduate students are eligible to live for up to two calendar years in university graduate accommodation. Accommodation is allocated according to length of time on the waiting list and availability of specific requirements (e.g. location, number of bedrooms). Students are allowed to retain their tenancies while suspended from study, up to the usual two-year maximum. A tenant who ceases to be a student will be given two months' notice to quit.

A student who is not already a tenant and who suspends his or her studies may apply for housing but cannot be offered it until they have re-enrolled. This means that suspended students may delay finding alternative accommodation while waiting to see whether university housing will become available in the month prior to their return to study. It was

considered that this might impose a particular barrier on women returning to study after taking maternity leave, as they might not find it practicable to delay making accommodation arrangements. Therefore the policy has been amended to facilitate their access to subsidised university accommodation and allow more time to make arrangements for childcare or education before they resume their studies. Parallel arrangements have been made for adoptive parents and student fathers taking extended paternity leave.

The new policy will assist returning parents by allowing them to be offered university graduate accommodation – should it become available – up to three months prior to their reinstatement. Usual tenancy regulations will apply, though it should be noted that most overseas students will not be able to return to Oxford more than a month before the start of term and therefore should not be expected to commence their tenancy prior to their return.

6.1 The Accommodation Office will log the requirements of students who have suspended their studies in order to take maternity leave, and who have applied for university accommodation. If the student becomes eligible for family accommodation by virtue of her position on the waiting list, no earlier than 3 months before her scheduled return to study, the Office shall offer her the tenancy.

6.2 This policy shall also apply to adoptive parents who have taken leave as the child's main carer and student fathers (of either sex) who have suspended their studies in order to take extended paternity leave (more than the standard 2 weeks' leave).

6.3 Overseas students who have suspended their studies are usually not permitted to remain in the UK so it is unlikely that they would be able to move into university accommodation more than a month prior to re-enrolment. However, some students may be able to remain in the UK (or reapply to enter the UK) as the dependant of their partner, provided s/he has an appropriate immigration status (e.g. British national, overseas student, indefinite leave to remain, Tier 1 or 2 working visa). They could therefore be eligible to move into family accommodation earlier than one month before they resume their studies.

6.4 This provision may be extended with good cause to students with children under 18 who have suspended for other reasons (e.g. illness), for example where new arrangements need to be made for the child's education or childcare.

6.5 If the student fails to return to study on the scheduled date, the tenancy will be terminated by the Landlord on giving two months' notice. In exceptional circumstances (e.g. serious illness of the student or child) an extension may be given.

6.6 It is not proposed at present to extend this policy to students without children who have suspended for other reasons, including illness and disability.

7. ACCESS TO CHILDCARE DURING SUSPENSION

Members of university staff who go on sabbatical leave may choose to retain their university nursery place (while continuing to pay fees) or give it up and rejoin the waiting list. However, there has been no similar policy in respect of students who have suspended their studies. These proposals formally codify and safeguard suspended students' access to university childcare.

7.1 Student parents whose child(ren) already attend(s) a university nursery may retain their nursery place(s) during suspension of study for a period of usually no longer than 12 months (while continuing to pay fees). Extensions may be considered in cases of demonstrated need, e.g. where suspension is due to maternity, illness or caring responsibilities.

7.2 Students who have suspended their studies (e.g. for maternity) may apply for a university nursery place and be placed on the waiting list. They do not need to wait until they are reinstated to take up a place if one becomes available.