



UNIVERSITY POLICY ON STUDENT MATERNITY, EXTENDED PATERNITY, ADOPTION AND SHARED PARENTAL LEAVE

This policy sets out a 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.

Further information is available on request from Education Policy Support (www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/contact) or Sara Smith in the Equality and Diversity Unit (equality@admin.ox.ac.uk).

1. 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 cooperation between the University and the College. It is anticipated that the main areas of impact on colleges will include:

- advising students on the timing of leave and assisting them to make applications for suspension of status (in the case of graduates, in cooperation with the appropriate department or faculty);
- 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 (in the case of graduates, in cooperation with the appropriate department or faculty).

Colleges may wish to draw up their own policies on maternity leave to ensure consistency of practice in relation to access to college premises, facilities and accommodation¹.

2. COLLECTING INFORMATION AT REGISTRATION

Collecting information on students' dependants helps 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.

- 2.1. Students are asked to state during the annual registration process whether they have any dependants under the age of 18.
- 2.2. The University uses the information collected at registration to inform student parents and carers of the facilities and resources available to them both within the

¹ E.g. Nuffield College's policy: <https://www.nuffield.ox.ac.uk/media/1449/student-maternity-and-paternity-leave-scheme.pdf>

collegiate University and more widely (see:
www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/childcare).

3. MATERNITY LEAVE

The University's policy has been harmonised with the Research Councils' framework and clearly differentiates maternity leave from suspension of status for medical or disciplinary reasons. It aims to ensure consistent and fair treatment of pregnant students and new mothers and provides new mothers with the right to a protected period of leave after the birth.

- 3.1. Students should notify their college, department, supervisor or Director of Graduate Studies of their pregnancy as soon as possible, and preferably no later than the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth². Earlier notification may be necessary in some cases, for example where a student works in a potentially hazardous environment³. If this is the case, the department in question must ensure that it has published this information and drawn students' attention to it.
- 3.2. Risk assessments must be made where the work environment (e.g. laboratory, clinic) might pose a threat to a pregnant student⁴. 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 UOHS 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).
- 3.3. In conjunction with the student, the college and department should draw up a student support plan to be reviewed at key stages during pregnancy and maternity. This will help coordinate support and ensure students' needs are met during pregnancy, following the birth and on the student's return to studies.

Same sex couples

- 3.4. In cases which do not fall under the arrangements for adoption leave set out in section 6 below, the student who gives birth to the child will be eligible to take maternity leave while their partner will be eligible to take paternity or shared parental leave.

Undergraduate and postgraduate taught students

- 3.5. Students who give birth may choose to suspend their status before recommencing their studies. This will normally last one full year so that the student may return to study at the same point at which they suspended. Where possible the leave period

² Pregnant students can obtain a maternity certificate (MATB1) from a doctor or midwife from the 20th week of pregnancy.

³ This could be as early as the fourth or fifth week of pregnancy in some cases, so advice should be sought at the earliest opportunity from the University Occupational Health Service.

⁴ Work environments that involve the following are more likely to present greater risks: physical activity including lifting and carrying; the use of chemicals, including paints and pesticides; radiation; compressed air environments; exposure to infectious disease.

should be timed to take account of the academic requirements of the course (e.g. project work), and should commence at the start of, rather than partway through, a term. Maternity leave cannot start later than the date of the child's birth and all new mothers are advised and expected to take a minimum of two weeks' leave immediately after the birth. Maternity leave should be taken under current college arrangements for suspension of status and the policies described in 3.11 – 3.14 relating to access to university services and arrangements for return to study will apply. Postgraduate students should also submit an application for suspension of status (see section 3.8 below).

Postgraduate research students

Maternity leave

- 3.6. Students who give birth during their period of registration for a postgraduate research degree are automatically entitled to suspend their status for up to 3 terms (1 year) of maternity leave. This period of leave is calculated separately from the 6 terms of ordinary suspension of status faculty or departmental boards may permit, and no special application to Education Committee is required. Terms of maternity leave do not have to be taken consecutively when sharing parental leave, but do have to be taken within 12 months of the birth and any unused terms may not be taken at a later date⁵.
- 3.7. 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.
- 3.8. Students should apply for maternity, extended paternity, shared parental or adoption leave on the [GSO.17b](#) form (Application for suspension of status for maternity, extended paternity, adoption or shared parental leave)⁶. The timing of maternity leave will depend on a number of factors, including term dates and the nature of the student's research work, though it would usually not be expected to commence before the 29th week of pregnancy. The leave period will start on the day of the baby's birth at the latest and new mothers are advised and expected not to return to study earlier than two weeks after the birth.
- 3.9. The relevant Graduate Studies Assistant (GSA) will update the student record system to indicate that maternity leave will be taken and the milestones and expected completion dates will automatically adjust. The GSA will also notify the Fees Team of any necessary fee amendments.
- 3.10. Suspensions of status are recorded on the student record system 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

⁵ Students who have been granted the maximum number of terms of suspension of status by their board and who have also taken maternity leave are permitted to seek dispensation from Education Committee for further suspension of status where required. Such requests will be considered on their individual merits.

⁶ <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/graduate/progression>

(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 status) where the expected date of childbirth falls during the Long Vacation and backdating suspension to the start of Trinity term is undesirable or the student is concerned that they will be disadvantaged (this might also 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 Assistant will forward applications to the Secretary of the Education Committee.

Access to University facilities

- 3.11. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students on maternity, extended paternity, adoption or shared parental leave will retain their university cards and Single Sign-On (SSO) access to online resources, including email, and to university libraries. 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 laboratories⁷.

Planning for return to study

- 3.12. Undergraduate and postgraduate students on maternity leave should be encouraged by their college and/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.
- 3.13. 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.
- 3.14. Risk assessments must also be made where the work environment might pose a threat to a breastfeeding mother (see section 3.2 above).
- 3.15. If ill-health prevents a postgraduate student from returning to work after completing their maximum period of maternity leave, this should be treated as sickness absence and further suspension of status should be sought and notifications made accordingly (i.e. to the funding body). If a student is unable to return to work due to the illness of their child, they should seek a further suspension of status, if necessary by application to the Education Committee.

Overseas students

- 3.16. Under the terms of the student visa, overseas students who suspend their status will need to obtain an extension to their visa, and may be required to return to their

⁷ <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/graduate/status>
<https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/undergraduate/status>

home countries while suspended. Students should consult the Student Immigration team for advice on immigration and visas (email student.immigration@admin.ox.ac.uk).

Funded maternity leave (postgraduate students)

- 3.17. The University aims to provide a limited period of funded maternity leave, and in some cases funded shared parental leave, for holders of all studentships funded or co-funded by the University where the expected week of childbirth falls within the period of the award.
- 3.18. Provision for funded maternity leave and shared parental leave should therefore be included in the planning for contingency funds when fund-raising for and designing University studentships.
- 3.19. Prior to receiving funded maternity leave or funded shared parental leave from the University, students are required to state their intention to return to their studies after taking the leave. Students who do not return to their studies for at least one term after taking funded leave may be required to pay back in full all monies received during the period of leave.
- 3.20. Research Council funded students are entitled to receive funded maternity leave. The first 26 weeks would normally be paid at full stipend, the following 13 weeks at a level commensurate with statutory maternity pay and the final 13 weeks unpaid; more details are available from the relevant Graduate Studies Assistant. Prior to receiving such funding, students are required to state their intention to return to their studies after taking maternity leave. Students who do not return to their studies for at least one term after taking funded maternity leave may be required to pay back in full all monies received during the period of leave. In some circumstances it may be possible for some of this funded leave to be taken as shared parental leave.
- 3.21. See section 8 below for details of the University's policy in relation to shared funded parental leave.

4. ADJUSTMENTS TO MODE OF STUDY

Where the option of transferring to part-time study does not already exist, this policy provides an opportunity for student parents to stage their return to full-time study by applying for permission to alter their mode of study, usually for a limited period.

Undergraduate students

- 4.1. 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 will be considered by the Fees Panel on a case-by-case basis.

Postgraduate taught students

- 4.2. It is not usually possible to study for a full-time postgraduate taught course 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 also endorses this proposal, the faculty or department 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 their 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. Where permission has been granted, students will be charged fees at the part-time rate⁸.

Postgraduate research students

- 4.3. A student whose programme of study is available on both a full-time and a part-time basis may apply to change their mode of study to part-time. Applications require the support of the student's supervisor or course director and college and must be made on the [GSO.4 form](#) (Application for change to mode of study)⁹. Approval of the application will be the responsibility of the relevant board.
- 4.4. If a student's programme of study is not normally available part-time, but 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 faculty or department 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 can demonstrate that their 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 submission deadlines will be recalculated. The faculty or department will review the student's progress no later than three terms after their return to study, at which point a decision will be made

⁸ N.B. Fee liability for one-year master's courses extends for six terms.

⁹ <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/graduate/progression>

on whether to transfer them back to full-time study or to allow them 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 without consultation with the Research Council.) Neither course of action will require a further application to Education Committee.

5. PATERNITY LEAVE

Same sex couples

- 5.1. In cases which do not fall under the arrangements for adoption leave set out in section 6 below, the student who gives birth to the child will be eligible to take maternity leave while their partner will be eligible to take paternity, extended paternity and/or shared parental leave. (In this section, the term 'father' refers to the member of the couple who takes paternity leave.)

Undergraduate and postgraduate taught students

- 5.2. Student fathers may take up to 2 weeks' (10 working days) leave at any time during a partner's pregnancy or within 3 months of the birth (paternity leave). 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 their studies at the same point at which they suspended (extended paternity leave). The possibility of additional fee liability should be taken into account should a student suspend their status part way through a term. Applications for remission of the additional term's university fees will be considered by the Fees Panel on a case-by-case basis. If students wish to take up to 2 weeks of paternity leave during term time, departments and colleges should try to assist them to make up lost time.

Postgraduate research students

- 5.3. Postgraduate research student fathers may take up to 2 weeks' (10 working days) leave at any time during a partner's pregnancy or within 3 months of the birth (paternity leave). In line with the policy adopted by the Research Councils, this leave is not taken as a suspension of status and the submission date is not adjusted.
- 5.4. 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 terms (1 year) (extended paternity leave). Terms of extended paternity leave do not have to be taken consecutively when sharing parental leave (see section 8 below), but do have to be taken within 12 months of the birth and any unused terms may not be taken at a later date. 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. Extended paternity leave will be awarded as a suspension of status over and above the 6 terms faculty or departmental boards

may permit. No special application to Education Committee is required and the student's submission date will be adjusted accordingly¹⁰.

- 5.5. Self-funded student fathers may take up to 2 weeks' (10 working days) leave at any time during a partner's pregnancy or within 3 months of the birth (paternity leave). This is not taken as a suspension of status 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 terms (1 year) (extended paternity leave). Terms of extended paternity leave do not have to be taken consecutively but do have to be taken within 12 months of the birth and any unused terms may not be taken at a later date. Extended paternity leave will be awarded as a suspension of status over and above the 6 terms faculty or departmental boards may permit. No special application to Education Committee is required and the student's submission date will be adjusted accordingly⁸.
- 5.6. 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 status are recorded on the student record system 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 [GSO.17b](#) form (Application for suspension of status for maternity, extended paternity, adoption or shared parental leave¹¹). The relevant Graduate Studies Assistant will update the student record system to indicate that extended paternity leave will be taken and the milestones and expected completion dates will automatically adjust. The GSA will also notify the Fees Team of any necessary fee amendments.

Overseas students

- 5.7. Under the terms of the student visa, overseas students who suspend their status will need to obtain an extension to their visa, and may be required to return to their home countries while suspended. Students should consult the Student Immigration team for advice on immigration and visas (email student.immigration@admin.ox.ac.uk).

6. ADOPTION LEAVE

Arrangements for adoption leave usually 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.

- 6.1. The child's main carer will be eligible to suspend their status in line with maternity leave provisions (see section 3 above). Terms of adoption leave do not have to be taken consecutively when sharing parental leave (see section 8 below), but do

¹⁰ Fathers who have been granted the maximum number of terms of suspension of status by their board and who have also taken paternity or shared parental leave are permitted to seek dispensation from Education Committee for further suspension of status where required. Such requests will be considered on their individual merits.

¹¹ <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/graduate/progression>

have to be taken within 12 months of the adoption and any unused terms may not be taken at a later date¹². Adoption leave may commence at any point after the student has been notified that they have been matched with a child.

- 6.2. A student who is the partner of an adopting parent will be eligible for leave in line with the relevant model for paternity leave (see section 5 above). Terms of adoption leave do not have to be taken consecutively when sharing parental leave (see section 8 below), but do have to be taken within 12 months of the adoption and any unused terms may not be taken at a later date¹¹.
- 6.3. 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 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. This period of leave is calculated separately from the 6 terms of ordinary suspension of status faculty or departmental boards may permit. No special application to Education Committee is required and the student's submission date will be adjusted accordingly. Terms of adoption leave do not have to be taken consecutively when sharing parental leave (see section 8 below), but do have to be taken within 12 months of the adoption and any unused terms may not be taken at a later date¹¹.

7. IVF AND SURROGACY

In cases which do not fall under the arrangements for adoption leave set out in section 6 above, or standard arrangements for maternity, paternity or shared parental leave, student parents are advised to contact their college or department for advice. The options available should be equivalent to those available for the other forms of leave set out in this policy.

8. SHARED PARENTAL LEAVE

- 8.1. In some circumstances, student parents may wish to share a period of parental leave. Periods of shared parental leave will be recorded as a suspension of status commencing at the start of the relevant term and concluding at the end of the subsequent vacation. Students should as far as possible align their parental leave with the tripartite structure of university terms and all terms of shared parental leave have to be taken within 12 months of the birth.

Shared funded parental leave (postgraduate students)

- 8.2. Research Council funded students may be entitled to share a period of funded parental leave depending on the individual circumstances. This would only normally be possible where both parents are RCUK funded students and the expected week of childbirth falls within the period of the award. A table indicating entitlement is provided at Annex A. Students should contact their department / GSA to discuss their options. Prior to receiving such funding, students will be

¹² Adoptive parents who have been granted the maximum number of terms of suspension of status by their board and who have also taken parental leave are permitted to seek dispensation from Education Committee for further suspension of status where required. Such requests will be considered on their individual merits.

required to state their intention to return to their studies after taking parental leave. In line with the RCUK policy, students who do not return to their studies for at least one term after taking funded parental leave may be required to pay back in full all monies received during the period of leave.

- 8.3. Holders of studentships funded or co-funded by the University may be entitled to a period of shared funded parental leave depending on the individual circumstances. This would only normally be considered where both parents are Oxford students and the expected week of childbirth falls within the period of the award. Students should contact the Student Fees and Funding team (student.funding@admin.ox.ac.uk) to discuss their options. Prior to receiving such funding, students will be required to state their intention to return to their studies after taking parental leave. Holders of studentships who do not return to their studies for at least one term after taking funded parental leave may be required to pay back in full all monies received during the period of leave.

9. GRADUATE ACCOMMODATION

All full-time matriculated postgraduate students are eligible to live in university graduate accommodation, subject to availability. Two-bed accommodation is allocated according to the applicant's position on the waiting list. Due to the shortage of single accommodation, this is allocated via a tiered waiting list which prioritises freshers. Students are allowed to retain their tenancies while suspended. A tenant who ceases to be a student should inform the Graduate Accommodation Office which will make arrangements where necessary for them to vacate the property.

This policy permits students who have suspended status to take maternity, extended paternity, adoption or shared parental leave to be offered university graduate accommodation – should it become available – up to three months before they re-enrol¹³. Usual tenancy regulations will apply. Students studying in the UK under a Tier 4 or other visa should check their visa regulations to establish when they are permitted to re-enter the UK (email student.immigration@admin.ox.ac.uk).

- 9.1. The Graduate Accommodation Office will log the requirements of students who have suspended status in order to take maternity leave, and register them on the waiting list. If the student becomes eligible for family accommodation by virtue of their position on the waiting list, no earlier than 3 months before their scheduled return to study, the Office shall offer them the tenancy.
- 9.2. This policy shall also apply to adoptive parents who have taken leave as the child's main carer (see section 6 above) and students who have suspended status for at least one term in order to take extended paternity or shared parental leave (see sections 5 and 8 above).

¹³ Under normal circumstances, a student who has suspended their status may apply for University accommodation but cannot be offered it until they have re-enrolled.

- 9.3. Overseas students who have suspended status are usually not permitted to remain in the UK so should not be requested to commence their tenancy prior to their return to study. However, some students may be able to remain in the UK (or reapply to enter the UK) as the dependant of their partner, provided they have 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.
- 9.4. 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.
- 9.5. If the student fails to return to study on the scheduled date, the student should inform the Graduate Accommodation Office which will make arrangements where necessary for them to vacate the property. In exceptional circumstances (e.g. serious illness of the student or child) an extension may be given.

10. ACCESS TO CHILDCARE DURING SUSPENSION

This policy formally codifies and safeguards suspended students' access to university childcare.

- 10.1. Student parents whose child(ren) already attend(s) a university nursery, or occupy(ies) a university place in a private nursery, may retain their nursery place(s) during suspension of status for maternity, paternity or shared parental leave for a period of usually no longer than 12 months (while continuing to pay fees).
- 10.2. Students who have suspended status for maternity, paternity or shared parental leave 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.

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Contact: Education Policy Support (<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/>)

Annex A: Research Council UK Shared Funded Parental Leave Provision

Research Council funded student partners can only share funded parental leave where both parents are RCUK funded students and the mother is in receipt of funded maternity leave. It is not a requirement for both parents to be students at Oxford University.

Eligibility can be summarised as follows:

Mother	Partner	Eligible for RCUK Shared Funded Leave from Oxford?
Not RCUK funded	Not Applicable	Not eligible.
RCUK funded, not at Oxford	Not RCUK funded, at Oxford	Not eligible.
RCUK funded, not at Oxford	RCUK funded, at Oxford	Potentially eligible. Will need to liaise with mother's institution to ensure no more than 26 weeks full pay and 13 weeks at a rate equivalent to Statutory Maternity Pay paid across both parents. Oxford to pay the weeks the partner took as shared funded leave.
RCUK funded, at Oxford	Not RCUK funded	Not eligible for shared leave; mother entitled to funded maternity leave.
RCUK funded, at Oxford	RCUK funded, at Oxford	Eligible. Will need to liaise with mother's department to ensure no more than 26 weeks full pay and 13 weeks at a rate equivalent to Statutory Maternity Pay paid across both parents. Oxford responsible for full payment.
RCUK funded, at Oxford	RCUK funded elsewhere	Potentially eligible. Will need to liaise with partner's institution to ensure no more than 26 weeks full pay and 13 weeks at a rate equivalent to Statutory Maternity Pay paid across both parents. Oxford to pay the weeks the mother took as maternity / shared funded leave.