

Maternity and Paternity Policy for Students at SOAS

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<p><i>Note: All policies must be read in conjunction with all other SOAS policy, procedure and guidance documents. Printed copies of policies may not be the most up to date, therefore please refer to the policy pages on the SOAS external website or intranet for the latest version.</i></p>			

1. Scope of the Policy

- 1.1. This policy is intended to cover
 - Any Full programme, Visiting or Associate student
 - any student who becomes pregnant during their studies
 - any student who is about to become a father
 - any student who is the partner (including same-sex partner) of someone who is pregnant and expects to be responsible for the child
 - any person becoming a parent (e.g. through adoption)
- 1.2. It is also intended to cover any applicant who has accepted a place to study at the School and falls into one of the above categories.
- 1.3. This Policy does not apply to Validated students who are subject to the Regulations and Policies at the partner institution at which they are registered.

2. Policy Statement

- 2.1. SOAS is determined that becoming pregnant or caring for a child should not, in itself, prevent any student from succeeding in their studies. The School is committed to showing as much flexibility as possible to facilitate students' success, ensuring that no such student is disadvantaged while also ensuring that academic standards are not compromised.
- 2.2. It is important for students to take responsibility for their own learning experience and alert the School to their maternity/paternity/caring responsibilities as set out in this policy so that appropriate steps may be taken to support them at the relevant time. Students will not normally be permitted a leave of absence or other facility under this policy in retrospect.

- 2.3. The health and safety of a pregnant student will be of paramount importance at all times, and students covered by this Policy will be treated at all times in a sensitive, nonjudgemental and confidential manner.

3. Guidance for Students Who Become Pregnant During Their Studies

- 3.1. A student who suspects that they are pregnant should see their GP to have the pregnancy confirmed as soon as possible. If they decide to terminate the pregnancy, or miscarry, this need not be disclosed to the University. Absence from the University required as a result should be reported as required by Regulation 13.1 of the General and Admissions Regulations for Students but there is no need to give the specific reason. A student who decides to continue with a pregnancy should discuss their position with relevant members of staff in their academic department as outlined below.

4. Preparing for Absence

- 4.1. Students and applicants covered by this Policy should disclose their situation to an appropriate and trusted member of staff in their academic department at an early stage of their pregnancy. The student should meet with their Personal Advisor (or equivalent) or Supervisor to discuss how the situation is likely to impact on their study. Any maternity leave will be taken under the arrangements for an interruption of study. Students who give birth during a programme of study may need to arrange a period of interruption of studies (in accordance with Regulation 13.3 of the General and Admissions Regulations for Students) depending on when the baby is due, and the student together with their Personal Adviser (or equivalent) or Supervisor will need to decide:

- (i) whether an interruption is needed and
- (ii) if so, the time period this needs to cover.

It will be the student's responsibility to complete any required request for interruption at the appropriate time.

- 4.2. Wherever possible, a period of interruption of study should be timed to take account of the academic requirements of the programme of study, and should commence at the end of rather than part-way through an academic semester. In each case, a 'Leave of Absence Application Form' must be completed by the student; this is available on the Registry website.
- 4.3. A pregnant student with a baby due near an examination period may need to obtain confirmation from their doctor that they are fit to sit the examinations. Time off might also be needed for medical appointments. Any implications for examination or assessment arrangements should be made in accordance with the normal arrangements for Special Examination Arrangements or in accordance with the Mitigating Circumstances Policy as appropriate.

- 4.4. If the student becomes pregnant whilst on a study year abroad, or, for a research student, while on fieldwork, they must contact their academic department to make appropriate plans to ensure that health is safeguarded and academic progress is properly managed.
- 4.5. A plan should be devised with the Programme Convenor or equivalent or Supervisor, identifying any special arrangements required during the student's pregnancy, and the agreed timescale for their return to study. Students should wherever possible maintain occasional contact with their Programme Convenor or equivalent or Supervisor during their absence in order that they may better prepare for their return to their studies.

Inevitably, other members of staff will need to be informed of any revised arrangements, and the student's permission should be established before passing on any such information.

If the student continues to study during their pregnancy, they should meet regularly with their Programme Convenor or Supervisor to assess the effectiveness of any special arrangements put in place. Where necessary, further adjustments may be made.

- 4.6. Before the student commences the period of interruption of study, preliminary arrangement for welcome-back meetings should be organised with the student's Programme Convenor or equivalent or Supervisor, and the identity of the person to contact during their absence if they encounter any difficulties should be made clear.
- 4.7. If an international student requires a visa to remain in the UK for study then immigration advice should be sought from the Student Advisor (Immigration and Finance) as soon as possible to discuss the impact a Leave of Absence would have on their visa status.

5. During the Maternity Leave

- 5.1. Students on maternity leave will be treated as would any other student on an approved Leave of Absence. Details of Library and other access is provided on the Leave of Absence Request Form.

6. Returning From Maternity-related Absence

- 6.1. The date when a student intends to return from maternity-related absence should be discussed and agreed with the Programme Convenor or equivalent or Supervisor prior to commencing the period of absence. However, this date may change during the course of the absence, and students are encouraged to notify the School as soon as possible of any change in their expected return date. The Programme Convenor or equivalent or Supervisor will review the student support plan and agree a new return date with the student in writing.

Before a student returns from a period of maternity-related absence, consideration should be given to their requirements on return. The student's study options and the continued support provided by the School should be discussed with the student in developing their support plan, and can be confirmed with the student prior to their return.

This might include varying the mode of study, and students should be aware of any options that exist to resume their programme of study. It should be noted that although part-time study is not usually possible for undergraduates at the School, this can be arranged in certain circumstances, and could be possible in the case of a student returning from maternity leave.

- 6.2. If a student requests to study part-time rather than full-time, the request should not be declined unless there are clear demonstrable reasons for doing so.
- 6.3. The student must inform the Department when they are ready to return and plan with their Programme Convenor or Supervisor an appropriate timetable for re-integration into their programme of study, including the examination schedule. The student must also notify Registry and complete any required enrolment process to ensure that their student record is updated to indicate that they have returned to attendance.
- 6.4. Any student who has given birth must not return to University within two weeks of giving birth for health and safety reasons, as per statutory restrictions.
- 6.5. Babies/Children on Campus

SOAS does not have its own nursery or crèche. Students requiring to bring their babies/children on campus should refer to the separate [Policy for Children and Young Persons on SOAS Premises](#).

7. Support for Fathers and Partners (including same-sex partners) Who Have Responsibility for Bringing Up the Child

- 7.1. Any student discovering they are to become a father, or any partner of a pregnant student (including same-sex partners) who expect to be responsible for raising the child with the mother, will be entitled to request time out of study. This is likely to include time off for medical appointments prior to, and after, the birth, as well as a period of maternity support leave immediately following the birth. Student parents are entitled to take two weeks away from their studies either at the time or within three months of the birth. This should be reported through the absence procedure and should normally be considered as an approved absence. Student parents may also take a longer period of interruption, but this would be considered an interruption of study, and would need to be applied for through the Registry. Wherever possible, this should be taken so as to minimise disruption to the student's programme of study, and for students following taught programmes of study will normally therefore involve a full year's interruption. A student in this situation should contact his/her Programme Convenor or Supervisor or other staff

member, to discuss this. Flexibility will be shown where possible although this will necessarily be more limited in some programmes than others. It should be noted that the student's Programme Convenor or Supervisor will need to be informed, even if initial discussions involve a different staff member. For students receiving research funding, it may be possible for a period of maternity support leave to be allowed, and students should contact their sponsor or provider prior to arranging leave.

8. For Students About to Become Parents (e.g. through adoption)

- 8.1. Students about to become parents (e.g. through adoption) should inform their academic department of their circumstances as soon as possible. Arrangements can be made to allow time out of study. This may vary depending on the age of the child, the programme of study being undertaken, and the point in the academic session at which the event takes place. Again, the student's Programme Convenor or Supervisor will be informed if discussions involve a different staff member. Arrangements for adoption leave should parallel those made for maternity and paternity leave, in that the main carer takes 'maternity leave', and the carer's partner takes 'paternity leave' irrespective of the actual gender of the individuals concerned.

9. Financial Considerations

- 9.1. Undergraduate students should note that funding will usually stop when a period of interruption of study begins. Students should seek advice from their funding body and advice may also be obtained through the Student Advice and Wellbeing Office.
- 9.2. Students who choose to return to studies part time should consider how this may impact on funding availability.
- 9.3. Postgraduate and Research students receiving funding from external bodies should follow the guidance for their particular scheme, or contact their funding body or sponsor for further advice.
- 9.4. International students with financial sponsors must contact their sponsors and agree a plan of action (such as deferring study/ when to resume study etc.). Some international students are not entitled to any maternity benefits in the UK and may therefore prefer to return home for the duration of their pregnancy, but it should be remembered that most airlines will not carry passengers who are seven months pregnant or more, and this should be taken into account when planning.
- 9.5. Scholarship applicants who have been nominated for an award must normally accept it in the current year and may not defer. The only exception to this is a nominee who needs to defer in order to take a period of maternity- or paternity-related absence, which must be evidenced. A student taking a period of interruption of studies will have scholarship funding suspended for the period of the interruption.

- 9.6. The benefit rules are different for EU students and international students, and further advice should be sought from the Student Advice and Wellbeing Office, or else directly from the Department for Work and Pensions.
- 9.7. Due to periodic changes in funding arrangements, students are advised to check with funding bodies about up to date funding provisions.

10. Complaints

- 10.1. Any student who feels that the University has failed to comply with the policy may raise a complaint under the Student Complaints Procedure. Wherever possible, problems should be resolved informally in the first instance. The Students' Union can provide impartial, confidential advice to students in this situation.

11. Equality and Diversity

- 11.1. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been carried out on this policy.