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# **Policy on Support for Pregnant Students and Students with Very Young Children**

## Introduction and key guiding principles

1. This document provides students and staff – particularly personal tutors, recruitment leads, postgraduate research supervisors and all other staff who have a role in advising or supporting students or prospective students – with information about how the College can support a student who is pregnant or has decided to terminate a pregnancy. It also provides information relating to supporting a student who has recently become a parent or guardian or is the partner of someone who has a very young child.
2. The College 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 College. The College is committed to being as supportive as possible, providing academic standards are upheld. The special arrangements which can and should be made for a student in these circumstances may vary from department to department, School to School and, indeed, from programme to programme.
3. The policy and associated guidance notes are based on a set of important guiding principles, namely:
  - a. **Avoiding unfavorable treatment.** The College and its staff should avoid treating a student (or applicant) unfavorably because they are pregnant<sup>1</sup> or have terminated a pregnancy, have given birth or are breastfeeding. Whilst particular arrangements may need to be made for an individual student (for example, a student must not return to College for two weeks after giving birth for health and safety reasons – see below), the College will seek to make sure that such arrangements do not place the student at a particular disadvantage compared to other students.
  - b. **Taking a supportive approach.** The College and its staff should take a supportive 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. Read Section E of the Guidance on Support for Pregnant Students and Students with Very Young children for guidance on determining an appropriate degree of flexibility.
  - c. **Demonstrating a non-judgmental and sensitive approach.** When supporting and working with a student on these matters, staff should take an open-minded and non-judgmental 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, health and safety, assessment, placements, fees etc.).
  - d. **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, adjustments that can be applied to the student's programme or period of study to provide appropriate support.

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<sup>1</sup> The Equality Act 2010 prohibits organisations, including the College, from discriminating against a person (including a student, staff member or visitor) on the grounds of pregnancy or maternity. Discrimination on the grounds that a student is pregnant can also constitute unlawful sex discrimination. The College is also placed, by the Equality Act 2006 and 2010, under a statutory duty to promote equality and to not discriminate on grounds of any protected characteristic. These guidelines have been drafted with these legal obligations in mind

## Summary of key responsibilities<sup>2</sup>

### 4. The College will ensure that:

- a. 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.
- b. Relevant staff are made aware of the terms of this policy and their responsibilities arising under it.
- c. 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 <https://intranet.royalholloway.ac.uk/staff/tools-and-links/health-and-safety/policies-and-procedures/maternity-and-the-risk-assessment-process.aspx>.
- d. Staff are available to discuss with professional services the best way to support the continuing study of a pregnant student to ensure they are able to complete their programme of study
  - i. Taught Students: [Student-Administration@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:Student-Administration@rhul.ac.uk)
  - ii. Research Students: [doctoralschool@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:doctoralschool@rhul.ac.uk)
  - iii. For general wellbeing guidance for all students: [Student Wellbeing](#) and [wellbeing@royalholloway.ac.uk](mailto:wellbeing@royalholloway.ac.uk)
- e. Appropriate support is available to students through various support services (refer to Section H\*)
- f. The policy is kept under review and updated as necessary.

### 5. Schools and Departments must ensure that:

- a. The policy is widely publicised and available to staff and students
- b. Students are made aware of the policy and able to disclose a pregnancy in confidence at an early stage, particularly where elements of their programme of study might result in a risk to the health and safety of the student or unborn child.
- c. 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
- d. 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.
- e. 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
- f. If requested, a suitable and appropriate member of staff is identified with whom a pregnant student can discuss their support needs
- g. The student is given information on other sources of advice/support. (Read Section H\*)

### 6. Individual staff members

- a. All individual staff members are **advised to**:
  - i. Familiarise themselves with this document and the College's responsibilities towards students who are pregnant or have very young children

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<sup>2</sup> Reference to very young children relates to children under the age of 6 months and, with particular regard to health and safety considerations, those beyond 6 month who are still being breastfed

- ii. Individual staff members to whom a pregnancy is disclosed are **responsible for**:
- Reading the policy and guidance documents and, in particular, becoming familiar with the procedure for supporting pregnant students.
  - Treating any disclosure of a pregnancy seriously and with compassion and for 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 available to applicants 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 College if they are unsure of how best to support the continued study of a pregnant student.

## 7. Students (and applicants)

- a. Students and applicants covered by this policy are **responsible for**:
- i. Disclosing their pregnancy to a trusted member of staff within their School/ Department at an earliest possible stage of their pregnancy, with a view to discussing any necessary support arrangements or adjustments – particularly where elements of their programme of study might result in a risk to their health and safety or that of their unborn child.
  - ii. Ensuring the safe supervision of any child they may bring onto campus in line with the [Children And Young Persons On College Premises Policy and Procedure.](#)
- iii. Students and applicants covered by this policy are **advised to**:
- Read the policy and associated guidance notes in order to understand the College'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 onsite NHS GP surgery or their own GP and, if required, staff in one or more of the following services: Student Advisory & Wellbeing (including Student Wellbeing, Student Counselling and Multi-faith Chaplaincy), the Student Services Centre, or Student Administration.

## Does a student need to notify their School/Department<sup>3</sup> of their pregnancy?

8. Students are not under any obligation to inform their School/Department 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/Department will not be able to take a supportive approach to the student's programme of study, or provide specific support to the student, unless it knows about the situation. If requested, the School/Department will identify a suitable and appropriate member of staff to discuss the support needs.
9. Whilst making a decision on whether or not to inform their School/Department, students are encouraged to consider the following:
  - a. 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<sup>4</sup>. A student's School/Department will not be able to arrange appropriate risk assessments unless it is aware of their pregnancy.
  - b. If a student's pregnancy-related absence (for example, for antenatal appointments) impacts significantly on the student's studies, the School/Department will only be able to take proper account of the reasons for absence if they are notified of these<sup>5</sup>.
  - c. In some cases, a student's pregnancy-related absence from College may need to be discussed with other organisations. For example, if a **postgraduate research student** is in receipt of a College or Departmental Scholarship or funding from a Research Council or other external body. The student should refer to the terms and conditions relating to their award. If this is the case the student will be required to notify their supervisor and if relevant complete the [Maternity, paternity and adoption leave form](#) or apply for a Suspension of Regulations to extend the submission date if they are near completion. The student must supply a MATB1 certificate or doctor's letter in support of both options.
  - d. Sometimes, the absence of a student from College can adversely affect the work of other students they are working alongside (for example, on a group project or in a research team). If this is the case a student is required to notify the School/Department, so that plans can be made to deal with any issues arising from any potential absence.
10. Various sources of advice and support are available to students, whether or not they decide to notify their School/Department of their circumstances (Read Section H\* for more information).

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<sup>3</sup> In most cases, the most appropriate place to report, and receive support for, pregnancy related needs will be the student's School/Department.

<sup>4</sup> 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/Department of their pregnancy in order to allow a risk assessment to be undertaken. Further guidance on such risks: [Potential risks to new and expectant mothers](#).

<sup>5</sup> In the case of pre-arranged antenatal appointments, the School/Department would normally need to be notified of these in advance in order to take these into account.

\*Section H within *Guidance on support for pregnant students and students with very young children*.