



**Higher Education Services
Pregnancy, Adoption & Family Leave
Policy (Students)**

July 2025

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Contents

1.0 Introduction.....	4
2.0 Scope.....	4
3.0 Disclosing a Pregnancy.....	4
4.0 Establishing a Learner Pregnancy.....	5
5.0 Learner Support.....	5
6.0 Maternity Leave and Related Absence.....	5
7.0 Returning to Study.....	6
8.0 Paternity.....	6
9.0 Adoption.....	6
10.0 Monitoring.....	7
Appendix.....	8

Higher Education Services Pregnancy, Adoption & Family Leave Policy

1.0 Introduction

1.1 FutureLearn is dedicated to fostering an inclusive environment for both work and study, one where individuals are respected, their differences are celebrated, and everyone feels empowered to engage fully and reach their potential. In England, Scotland, and Wales, the legal rights of students during pregnancy and maternity have been significantly reinforced by the [Equality Act 2010](#). This legislation identifies pregnancy and maternity as one of nine protected characteristics and expressly prohibits any form of discrimination on these grounds.

1.2 A student who is pregnant or has given birth within the last 26 weeks is explicitly protected from unfavourable treatment. This includes protection from unfavourable treatment while breastfeeding. FutureLearn is committed to providing a supportive environment where students, regardless of background, are treated in the same way and receive compassionate and equitable treatment and support.

2.0 Scope

2.1 The policy will outline the support and entitlements for students during pregnancy and maternity. The policy will also provide guidance on those students wishing to take paternity, adoption or family leave. FutureLearn believes that such change of circumstance should not become a barrier to study and aims to be flexible with its provision. The policy has been written in consultation with the Equality Act 2010 and Advance HE: [Student pregnancy and maternity: implications for higher education institutions](#).

2.2 This policy does not include those students who are under an OPM sub-contractual arrangement, for example, Brunel University and Roehampton University. Students should follow the policies below.

- Brunel University (BU), [Student Pregnancy, Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Policy](#)
- Roehampton University (RU), [Student Pregnancy And New Parenthood Policy](#)

3.0 Disclosing a Pregnancy

3.1 When a student shares the pregnancy with FutureLearn or a partner university, they should receive *non-judgmental, consistent guidance* to make informed decisions.

Pregnant students must never face bias or inappropriate comments like:

- “Are you getting a termination?”
- “Aren’t you too young?”
- “Isn’t your programme more important right now?”

3.2 If a student doesn’t disclose their pregnancy, reasonable adjustments and support are not possible. Though there’s no legal barrier to reaching out if pregnancy is suspected, this should only happen with certainty and if there’s a clear health or wellbeing concern. Without cause, such outreach may feel invasive or discriminatory.

3.3 FutureLearn therefore encourages transparency by making pregnancy-related support visible and accessible. FutureLearn builds a culture where students feel safe to disclose, and regularly provide chances to do so, whether during onboarding, in platform materials, through 1-2-1 tutorials, or through guidance policies.

4.0 Establishing a Learner Pregnancy

4.1 Where a student discloses a pregnancy, they are not required to provide proof. Generally, if an individual has already conducted a home test the GP will refer the individual to the community midwife. At 20 weeks the individual may receive a maternity certificate, but this is not proof for FutureLearn, but rather eligibility to claim statutory maternity pay or allowance within the UK.

5.0 Learner Support

5.1 When a student discovers they are pregnant they should disclose this to either the programme leader, personal tutor, supervisor or student services team. Students should not leave disclosing the pregnancy to after 15 weeks before the due date as this may impact on current study periods. Planning in advance for a break in studies is recommended.

5.2 If disclosed to a member of the academic team the academic member of staff will report it to student services. Student services will then signpost the student to support at the partner university and follow the university's process for a break in learning.

5.3 If a student is a registered FutureLearn student then the break in learning will be processed by FutureLearn.

5.4 FutureLearn student services will arrange to meet with the student to discuss the support required while continuing to study, and before maternity leave commences. Where possible reasonable adjustments will be accommodated. A student support plan will be developed with the student.

5.5 The [support plan](#) includes:

- Which staff need to be communicated with regarding the pregnancy.
- What information will need to be communicated to the student regarding continued study and planned leave.
- Outcomes from a risk assessment of the study environment and length of time the student focuses on their programme.
- Antenatal care, a record of planned appointments will be recorded and support to be put in place if these occur during study time.
- Examinations and assessments will be reviewed to ensure whether the student can complete them or programme teams need to be consulted with a view to make reasonable adjustments.
- Confirmation as to how the student and FutureLearn will continue to communicate when the break in learning commences.

The support plan will be reviewed at week 20 and 30.

5.6 There may be times when a student decides not to continue with the pregnancy, may miscarry, or the baby is still born or a neonatal death occurs and this can be a distressing time. FutureLearn is committed to supporting the student. It will work with the student, signposting the student to partner university counselling services where available or to external sources of help such as the [Family Planning Association](#), [Antenatal Results and Choice](#), [Mind, Sands](#) or [The Miscarriage Association](#).

6.0 Maternity Leave and Related Absence

6.1 All students are permitted to take maternity leave and related absence following the birth of a child. There is no mandatory requirement for students to take leave, however it is strongly recommended.

6.2 In most cases, the student will interrupt their studies and student services will be able to coach students and help students to plan their leave. Students can commence with their maternity at any time, however generally through leave of absence a student is permitted to take a maximum period away from

studies, usually one year. This may differ between universities, refer to the partner links. Extended leave of absence may be considered due to circumstances such as ill health or loss of the child.

7.0 Returning to Study

7.1 Before a student returns after maternity leave, the transition back should be planned in partnership with the student. Programme options and ongoing support should be discussed early and confirmed ahead of the return by student services. This might include:

- **Flexible learning formats:** Students should be informed about part-time possibilities. A request to reduce study intensity should only be declined with clear, written reasoning.
- **Welcoming reintegration:** Re-entry can be made smoother through scheduled check-ins with key contacts such as lecturers, programme leaders, or support staff.
- **Clear support pathways:** Students should know who to reach out to if challenges arise.

8.0 Paternity

8.1 While paternity leave and pay are covered under employment law, most students don't qualify. Still, FutureLearn and partner institutions encourage time off for students supporting a partner through childbirth. Importantly, under the Equality Act 2010, treating a male student unfairly due to the partner's pregnancy may be considered *sex discrimination by association*. For instance, denying coursework flexibility because the partner is expecting could breach these protections.

8.2 If a male partner is permitted paternity-related absence but a female student in a same-sex relationship isn't offered the same, this could be seen as *discrimination based on sexual orientation*. Although Northern Ireland currently lacks parallel protections for students, vocational training participants might still have some coverage.

8.3 In line with the partner university regulations, see the links above, flexibility of partners is shown when attending antenatal appointments or pregnancy-related illnesses.

8.4 Students should not leave disclosing paternity-related absence to after 15 weeks before the due date as this may impact on current study periods. Planning in advance for a break in studies is recommended.

8.5 Student services will coach the partner through the partner university processes when they plan their paternity-related absence. The duration of this leave will differ between partners' policies. Generally, students will be able to take leave during the first year of the child being born.

8.6 Where students take time away from their studies a support plan will be completed with the student and student services to identify the type of support and agree on contact.

8.7 If the student is due to sit an examination but cannot due to paternity-related leave or labour then the student will be able to request a resit or be given an extension if assignment-related.

9.0 Adoption

9.1 Students matched for adoption are encouraged to notify their programme leader, personal tutor, supervisor, or a member of the student services team. If the student is the primary adopter, a support plan will be created. Where the student's partner is the primary adopter, the student is entitled to time away from studies following the official adoption of the child, in accordance with the guidance provided above regarding paternity-related leave.

10.0 Monitoring

10.1 FutureLearn will monitor this policy however if a student feels they have a complaint that they are not adequately supported, they can submit a complaint through the formal complaints procedure.

10.2 This policy will be reviewed every three years by the Academic Registrar.

Appendix

Student Support Plan

Learner Details	
Name	
Address	
Telephone	
Email	
Student ID	
Programme title	
Enrolment date	
Consent to contact next of kin	
Dates	
Due date	
How many weeks pregnant when FutureLearn was notified?	
Informing Other Staff and Learners	
Name and title	Date
Risk Assessment	
The student's programme	
Examinations and assessments (readjustments needed, include details if any)	
Student's study environment	
Attendance and appointments	
Return from maternity-related absence	

Breastfeeding	
Where changes are required to minimise risk, who is responsible for ensuring these are implemented?	
Pregnancy-Related Absence	
Will the dates or times of antenatal appointments affect the student's study?	
Have you discussed any pregnancy-related illness that has affected the student's ability to undertake their course?	
If yes to either of the above questions, what arrangements have been made to enable the student to catch up?	
Maternity-Related Absence	
How much maternity-related absence does the student intend to take?	
When does the student intend to start maternity-related absence?	
When does the student intend to return from maternity-related absence?	
Financial Support	
Has the student been spoken to about any financial support that may be available?	
Exceptional Circumstances	
Has the student been informed about how to apply for exceptional circumstances in the event their pregnancy, maternity or parental responsibilities affects examinations and assessments?	
Further Information	
Signatures	
Student Services Advisor	
Name	
Title	
Signature	
Date	

Agreed by the Student

Name

Signature

Date