

GM LEARNER PREGNANCY, MATERNITY, NEW PARENTHOOD AND ADOPTION POLICY

This policy has been developed collaboratively with all four Greater Manchester Universities in consultation with practice partners. This policy sets out to standardise, where possible, the approach to supporting learners in relation to pregnancy, maternity, adoption, and new parenthood, including surrogacy arrangements, specifically within practice settings. This policy should be read in conjunction with specific policies relating to the university that the learner is aligned to as well as trust specific policies in the specific areas of practice that they are allocated to.

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Introduction

The Equality Act 2010 extended the protection from discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy and maternity outside the workplace and now includes learners. Under the Act it is unlawful to discriminate against applicants and learners in relation to admissions; the provision of education; access to benefits, facility, or service; and disciplinary proceedings if:

- the learner is treated unfavourably due to being pregnant
- within 26 weeks of the day of giving birth the learner is treated unfavourably (applies in cases of birth, miscarriage, still birth and neonatal death)
- the learner is treated unfavourably whilst breastfeeding, and the child is less than 26 weeks old; if the child is more than 26 weeks old, unfavourable treatment because of breastfeeding is likely to constitute sex discrimination

Scope

This policy covers any learner who is or becomes pregnant, or takes maternity absence during their studies, and learners who are about to become parents. It also covers any learner who is the partner of someone who is pregnant and expects to be responsible for the child, and any person becoming a parent of a child, for example through adoption or surrogacy. Within this policy, the birthing person includes females whose gender identity might differ from that at birth or who may be transitioning.

This policy focuses specifically on the **practice placement elements** of a learner's programme of study and should be considered alongside specific university guidance on pregnancy and parental leave during academic study. Each practice placement area will also have specific guidance and risk assessments that must be adhered to and completed. Whilst in practice, learners are expected to comply with the policies and procedures that apply to pregnant and postnatal staff in practice.

Policy statement

The GM Universities believe that becoming pregnant or caring for a child should not prevent any learner from succeeding in their studies and completing their practice elements of the programme. We are committed to supporting pregnant learners and providing flexibility, wherever possible, in making sure that the learner is not disadvantaged, whilst ensuring academic and practice standards are not compromised.

The health and safety of a pregnant learner is paramount, and all universities and placement providers should manage all learners covered by this policy in a sensitive, non-judgemental, inclusive and confidential manner. Information concerning a learner's pregnancy will be

treated sensitively and be passed on only with the learner's consent and in line with HEI policies and reasonable adjustment plans.

In a situation where a learner seeks advice from a member of staff, either within the university or in practice, on any aspect of the pregnancy, members of staff who are not qualified to counsel women during pregnancy should refer the learner to appropriately qualified personnel and must not attempt to advise her themselves. A list of specific support is available within each University Learner pregnancy and maternity policies

For learners who become pregnant during their studies: confirming the pregnancy

A learner who suspects they are pregnant should see their GP or local midwifery service to access appropriate care and support. If a decision to terminate the pregnancy or the individual miscarries, disclosure to the University or practice is not required. If the learner is subsequently unable to complete or attend placements due to the termination or miscarriage and is required to make an application for mitigating circumstances, written evidence of the pregnancy will need to be submitted which could be either a letter from a GP, midwife or from a doctor based in a pregnancy counselling organisation. **NB: this will differ for each university. Please edit to reflect your own policies and procedures around mitigation.**

Contacting the University and advising practice placement

If the learner plans to continue with the pregnancy, the university should be informed as soon as possible. Programme leads/directors or a designated lead should be informed in writing as in the event of an examination or assessment being missed and if the learner is unable/unwilling to provide evidence, the designated lead can confirm that they have seen evidence to cover the absence. If the learner is in practice when the pregnancy is confirmed, then the practice supervisor/assessor/educator should be informed with the learners consent to enable an appropriate risk assessment to be completed and any reasonable adjustments to be put in place.

If the learner subsequently miscarries after notifying the university and/or practice of the pregnancy, it is advisable for the learner to disclose the miscarriage to facilitate appropriate support and any further reasonable adjustments.

Implications for practice placements

The university does not require proof when the learner declares a pregnancy, however the learner should be aware that any reasonable adjustment requests related to maternity will require the learner to submit supporting evidence of the pregnancy or maternity. Evidence required to support reasonable adjustments could be either a letter from the GP or midwife or a maternity certificate (MATB1 form which is issued after 20 weeks).

Time off might be needed for antenatal appointments. This may impact on attendance in practice and completion of hours. Learners must ask for time off to attend appointments, and this should be agreed with the practice area they are working within. If a university needs to take into consideration the impact of the learner pregnancy or maternity on placement attendance or attainment, evidence of appointments and letters from the learner's GP, midwife, or health worker will be needed. **NB: this will differ for each university. Please edit to reflect your own policies and procedures around mitigation**

A learner should be allowed to decide when they start maternity-related absence in agreement with the university and is able to attend practice up to the due date, where safe to do so, or from starting maternity-related absence either at full term or a semester before the due date, unless it is impractical to do so. Local risk assessments in the specific practice area will inform whether this is practical and safe for the learner.

Where a learner is close to the due date and unable to attend practice as planned, the university in consultation with the learner may agree to allow maternity-related absence to start earlier than planned. If appropriate, other alternative methods can be explored in order for the learner to meet their practice requirements, such as alternative lower risk learning environments.

Enabling time off

Whilst it is recognised that each request must be dealt with on an individual basis, there are several measures that can be used in order to enable the learner's continuation of study. These may include:

- Facilitating appropriate time out of study/placements for a period of time prior to and after the birth
- Agreeing periods of absence for antenatal and medical appointments
- Making arrangements for the learner to catch up on missed practice hours
- Showing a degree of flexibility regarding assignments for the learner's circumstances where it is difficult for deadlines to be met
- Allowing resit placements to be counted as first attempts where the pregnancy or birth prevents the learner from completing them at the usual first attempt
- Offering support to help the learner reintegrate to practice after any period of prolonged absence

In order to ensure that arrangements are put in place, the learner should notify the university, 15 weeks before the expected birth of their child, as to when they would like their maternity absence to commence. This will enable timely communication with practice placement providers.

Where specific arrangements are required to be put in place for a learner who already has special arrangements in place e.g., on grounds of disability, these should be kept separate to ensure that it is clear which arrangements are in place for the required amount of time.

Learner support and reasonable adjustments

The university designated person will meet with the learner to discuss how the pregnancy is likely to impact on the programme of study which may include an interruption of study depending on when the baby is due. If an interruption of study is needed, the time period needs to be agreed between the learner and the designated person. If the learner continues to study during pregnancy, regular meetings with the designated person to assess the effectiveness of any special arrangements with consideration for further adjustments as appropriate. Specifically, the designated person should discuss any implications for practice placements and reasonable adjustments that may be required as well as ensuring that managing the demands of the programme do not impact on the pregnancy. It is essential that a full health and safety risk assessment is conducted for each area of practice placement undertaken by the staff within that area.

A plan should be devised detailing any special arrangements required by using the appropriate documentation for the specific university.

Length of maternity-related absence

At a minimum, learners should be allowed to take one year out of study. Details of specific university support during maternity-related absence can be found within the specific university learner Pregnancy and Maternity Policies. Learners should be aware that the most appropriate point of return may not be exactly at the point in the programme that they interrupted their studies. Learners should have a discussion with the programme team about the factors that will need to be considered to facilitate a return, and the required timeframe, which will allow appropriate practice learning opportunities and assessment periods.

Resuming Studies and practice placements

The learner must inform the university in writing of the intended return date and plan with the Personal Tutor an appropriate timescale for re-integration into the programme of study, including the practice placement elements. The learner is required to re-enrol online back onto their course. If the learner is not enrolled, they are not insured to attend practice placement.

- Following birth, the learner **must** not return to university or practice for a minimum of two weeks for health and safety reasons.
- If the learner has had a caesarean section they **must** not return to placement until a minimum of **six weeks** from giving birth unless they have a GP fit note. A full health and safety risk assessment must be undertaken within the practice area before the learner can re-commence practice placement and this should be facilitated by the learner with personal tutor/designated lead support. The practice area allocated to the learner should also take into account their specific postnatal circumstances.

Health and Safety

There are health and safety considerations that arise during pregnancy and breastfeeding and the risks to which learners could be exposed need to be assessed.

The highest risk to the baby is during the first trimester of pregnancy. Consequently, learners should be encouraged to notify the University as early as possible of their pregnancy so that a health and safety assessment can be conducted in the practice placement area. This should be undertaken by a member of staff experienced in undertaking risk assessments. The level of risk to which a learner is exposed will depend on the requirements and nature of the specific placement area in which she/they are working. This will vary between placement areas and consequently, this risk should be re-assessed prior to the start of each placement experience.

Financial implications

More detail about this can be found within the specific university Learner Pregnancy and maternity Policies. Additional information can be found from the relevant student loan company and from the NHS bursaries unit.

Travel

Unless they are advised not to do so by their GP or midwife, learners should be able to travel to and from placement during pregnancy. If there are specific circumstances that limit this, the learner must highlight this via the reasonable adjustments process to ensure that their placement allocations are adjusted accordingly.

Breastfeeding

Each university has facilities available to express milk. During practice placements, this requirement should be discussed with the practice supervisor/assessor/educator in order to identify the most appropriate place for this to occur.

Miscarriage, stillbirths and neonatal death

Miscarriage is most likely to occur in the first three months of pregnancy. If a learner miscarries, time off to recover may be needed. Consideration should be given to the impact of a miscarriage on the learner's ability to meet deadlines and attend practice placements. Information on support for a learner who miscarries is available in each university's specific guidance documents.

A learner who has a stillbirth or whose baby dies shortly after birth is entitled to the same length of maternity leave, wellbeing and financial support. Information on support for a

learner who has a stillbirth or who experiences a neonatal death is available in university's specific guidance documents.

Support for fathers and partners who have responsibility for raising the child.

Any learner discovering that they are is to become a parent with responsibility for raising a child, will be entitled to request time out of study including practice placements.

A learner may want to attend their partner's antenatal appointments or may need time off if their partner has pregnancy complications or a serious pregnancy related illness.

If a learner wants to take paternity/partner related absence, they should inform their personal tutor at least 15 weeks before the baby is due, but a degree of flexibility may be needed, and this will be discussed on an individual basis.

Early notification to practice placement staff to request that they can attend antenatal appointments is expected to allow flexibility in making special arrangements.

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be monitored annually to judge its effectiveness and updated in accordance with changes in the law. Overall governance for this policy sits with GM Practice Education Centre of Excellence.

Each of the GM universities will have local policies that support and accompany this policy. Learners are directed to their own study areas to ensure that they have considered this alongside the following policies within their own university (please note, policy names may vary between universities:

- Learner Pregnancy and Maternity Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Mental Health Policy
- Learner Complaints Procedure
- Learner Disciplinary Procedure
- Confidentiality Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Learner attendance Policy
- Fitness to Practice Policy
- Learner Appeals Policy

Flowchart outlining process to be followed:

