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# Policy on Supports for Student Parents, Student Carers and Students Experiencing Pregnancy

## 1. Context

The second version of this policy is considered in context with the following College, and sectoral policies

- I. The College Strategic Plan 2020 to 2025
- II. The College Breastfeeding Policy
- III. The Irish Research Council Policy on Leave for Parents and Carers
- IV. The Science Foundation Ireland Policy on Maternity and Adoptive Leave

The last decade has seen significant changes in the funding landscape for postgraduate students, with policy development around funding during maternity leave. Within our own context in Trinity College Dublin, our values are to be Inquisitive, Pioneering, Responsible, Inclusive, and Collaborative. The first version of this policy was the first of its kind in Ireland. It is now time to update the policy to be in-line with changes in the policy landscape.

## 2. Purpose

This policy aims to support students as they navigate myriad complexities of additional caring responsibilities and pregnancy. Specifically, the purpose of this policy is to clarify:

- 2.1 steps relating to the health, wellbeing, and safety of students experiencing pregnancy,
- 2.2 steps relating to the health, wellbeing, and safety of student parent with student with other caring responsibilities,
- 2.3 roles and responsibilities of academic, research, professional and support staff in advising and responding to the needs of pregnant students, students who are parents and students who are carers,
- 2.4 steps to ensure that there should be no academic or financial penalty for a student taking maternity, paternity, adoptive, or carer's leave,
- 2.5 steps where possible to facilitate students in returning to their studies at the point they left rather than having to repeat the whole year,
- 2.6 and to lay out for students and their advisors a clear set of protocols and a range of flexible accommodations that will assist students who are parents or carers or who are experiencing pregnancy,
- 2.7 To assist such students in balancing their responsibilities in the College and at home,
- 2.8 To identify where responsibility lies for the coordination of this assistance,
- 2.9 To ensure clear communication of the contents of this policy across the College community, and
- 2.10 To recognise the diverse demands on its students in their individual lives and with their families and dependents.



### **3. Benefits**

3.1 This Policy lays down guidelines for good practice in the College's provision for and commitment to those students who become pregnant or who have parental or other caring responsibilities at any point during their time in College, while ensuring alignment with College's academic progression regulations,

3.2 This Policy provides clarity for student parents, student carers, and those experiencing pregnancy policy on what supports and structures are in place to help them safely progress in their studies alongside their responsibilities as parents, carers or while they are pregnant.

3.3 This policy provides clarity for academic and professional staff in how to respond to requests for support or accommodations from students who are parents, carers or who are experiencing pregnancy.

### **4. Scope**

This policy is applicable to all registered Undergraduate and Postgraduate students experiencing pregnancy, and students who are or who become parents or carers.

### **5. Principles**

5.1 The concepts of inclusion and diversity are central to Trinity's ethos of academic and service excellence.

5.2 Trinity is committed to recruiting and retaining the most talented undergraduate and postgraduate students from a diversity of backgrounds and circumstances, and to ensuring that its students reach their full potential.

### **6. Policy**

#### **6.1 Student Parents and Carers**

Students who are parents or carers and feel that their responsibilities outside College will impact on their studies should contact their personal tutor, supervisor, course co-ordinator, or the Postgraduate Advisory Service. Together they should make a management plan in conjunction with the School, taking into account the demands of the course, the expected demands of the carers' responsibilities, and the achievement of academic standards. This plan should be revisited as necessary, but at least annually.

##### **6.1.1 Attendance, Deadlines, and Timetables**

6.1.1.1 College will make reasonable efforts take into account the needs of student parents and carers and where feasible prioritise family-friendly timetables. This includes out-of-hours classes and recognition that school holidays may not align with College vacation periods or study weeks. Students should let College know of their additional caring responsibilities as soon as possible after they accept a place so that arrangements can be made. In special circumstances, reasonable accommodations will be made for student parents and carers to hand in assignments during the summer



months if they have had cumulative issues relating to their caring responsibilities during the year. In these cases, the supplemental marking period will be treated as a first attempt.

6.1.1.2 Student parents and carers will be given information about course content, assignment deadlines, and timetables well in advance of registration. Timetables will be made available between one and three months before the start of term to facilitate timely arrangements for caring.

6.1.1.3 Examination information should be made available as soon as possible during the year. Students with caring responsibilities should be available in order to fulfil their academic requirements and should take this into account when planning additional care.

#### 6.1.2 Dependents' Illness and other special circumstances

6.1.2.1 Students who are parents or carers may need to provide certifications. This might take the form of certificates from medical professionals or, in certain circumstances, self-certification.

6.1.2.2 College understands that although plans will have been made, there are occasions that when circumstances change suddenly. College will use reasonable endeavours to support and facilitate students in these circumstances. When there is a sudden change in circumstance students who are carers should contact their personal tutor, supervisor, course co-ordinator, or the Postgraduate Advisory Service as soon as possible to assess the situation.

6.1.2.3 Those students who are parents may have to stay at home with sick dependents. It is understood that though a dependent may not be ill enough for a doctor, caring facilities have regulations about admittance of ill children and dependent adults to professional care facilities.

6.1.2.4 In the case where a dependent is ill, self-certification is permitted for the first three days of the dependent's illness.

6.1.2.5 After three days certification from a GP is required.

6.1.2.6 College will accept the certification in the same manner as if it were the student's in relation to assignments, attendance, and examinations.

#### 6.1.3 Facilities for Students with Young Children

6.1.3.1 College has a student parent group which meets during term time, all registered students who are parents may seek to join. More information can be found through the Undergraduate Support Officer in the Senior Tutor's Office, [undergrad.support@tcd.ie](mailto:undergrad.support@tcd.ie)

6.1.3.2 There are crèche and day nursery facilities on campus. More information can be found <https://www.tcd.ie/about/services/daynursery/>

6.1.3.3 Trinity is a Breastfeeding Friendly Campus and supports breastfeeding as a normal way to feed babies. More information on supports and facilities can be found in the links below. <https://www.tcd.ie/healthytrinity/breastfeeding/> and <https://www.tcd.ie/healthytrinity/breastfeeding/breastfeedingroom.php>

## 6.2 Students who are pregnant

Some students will find themselves in a situation where they and /or their partner is



experiencing a crisis pregnancy. Students should be treated without judgement and with compassion. They should be told about all the supports available to them in College and encouraged to use them if they feel the need. Students may also be directed to reputable supports available outside of College if they feel they need them.

#### 6.2.1 Undergraduate students who are pregnant

6.2.1.1 Students who are pregnant should first of all confirm their pregnancy with their GP, family planning clinic, or the College Health Centre.

6.2.1.2 Students are under no obligation to disclose their pregnancy UNLESS their course of study puts them or their pregnancy at risk, in which case they must disclose or seek to go off-books. These regulations can be found in the College Calendar, Part II, Section B, 'Interruption of Studies'. <https://www.tcd.ie/calendar/undergraduate-studies/general-regulations-and-information.pdf>

6.2.1.3 If and when a student decides to disclose their pregnancy they should speak with their personal tutor or the relevant Students' Union Welfare Officer. The person to whom the student discloses should make the student aware of all the College supports available.

6.2.1.4 Issues concerning the health, safety, and well-being of the mother and baby must be considered. A safety assessment of the learning environment should be made and any necessary precautions put into place in consultation with the course coordinator.

6.2.1.5 The student, personal tutor and course coordinator should draw up a management plan and circulate it to all relevant areas of College, taking into account the student's right to privacy. This plan should be reviewed and amended as necessary in consultation with all the relevant people. Flexibility, where practicable, should be made for pregnant students to attend any appointments they require for their health and well-being (e.g. counselling, ante-natal, medical).

6.2.1.6 Students will not experience disadvantage for being absent from tutorials, lectures, labs, practicals, or examinations, however students must fulfil all academic and professional accreditation requirements in order to rise with their year or proceed to commencement.

6.2.1.7 Appropriate facilities for seating and note-taking should be made available for in all lecture, tutorial, examination, and practical venues.

#### 6.2.2 Postgraduate students who are pregnant

6.2.2.1 Students who are pregnant should first of all confirm their pregnancy with their GP, family planning clinic, or the College Health Centre.

6.2.2.2 Students are under no obligation to disclose their pregnancy UNLESS their course of study puts them or their pregnancy at risk, in which case they must disclose or seek to go off- books. The regulations relating to this can be found in the College Calendar Part III, Section I, 'Attendance and Off-Books', <https://www.tcd.ie/calendar/graduate-studies-higher-degrees/section-I.pdf>, and also Section II 'Extension and Off-Books' <https://www.tcd.ie/calendar/graduate-studies-higher-degrees/section-II.pdf>.

6.2.2.3 If and when students decide to disclose their pregnancy they should speak with their supervisor, or the Postgraduate Advisory Service or the relevant Students' Union



Welfare Officer.

6.2.2.4 The person to whom the student discloses should make the student aware of all the College supports available.

6.2.2.5 Issues concerning the health, safety, and well-being of the mother and baby must be considered.

6.2.2.6 Appropriate facilities for seating and note-taking should be made available for in all lecture, tutorial, examination, and practical venues.

6.2.2.7 A safety assessment of the learning environment should be made and any necessary precautions put into place in consultation with the supervisor.

6.2.2.8 The student, in consultation with the Postgraduate Advisory Service and supervisor, should draw up a management plan and circulate it to all relevant areas of College, taking into account the student's right to privacy. This plan should be reviewed and amended as necessary in consultation with all the relevant people.

6.2.2.9 Flexibility, where practicable, should be made for pregnant students to attend any appointments they require for their health and well-being (e.g. counselling, ante-natal, medical).

6.2.2.10 Students will not experience disadvantage for necessary absence from tutorials, lectures, labs, practicals, or examinations, however students must fulfil all academic and professional accreditation requirements in order progress into the next year or to commencement.

### **6.3 Undergraduate students seeking maternity, paternity, and adoptive leave**

6.3.1 Undergraduate students choosing to avail of maternity leave should inform College through their personal tutor as soon as practicable but not later than four weeks before the commencement of maternity leave. Additionally, not later than the time of the above notification, they are obliged to supply the tutor with a medical certificate confirming the pregnancy and specifying the expected date of birth. Maternity leave must commence not later than two weeks before the expected date of birth and end not earlier than four weeks after the expected date of birth.

6.3.2 The tutor must then immediately forward the request for leave to the academic registry. This is likely to mean applying to the Senior Lecturer/Dean of Undergraduate Studies to go off-books, unless the majority of the time falls with a vacation period.

6.3.3 Paternity leave for undergraduate students is available by application to Senior Lecturer on ad misericordiam grounds relating to the pregnancy of their partner for a maximum of four weeks only. Students requiring more extended periods must apply to go "off-books".

### **6.4 Postgraduate students seeking maternity, paternity and adoptive leave**

6.4.1 Full-time graduate students undertaking a thesis/dissertation who are pregnant may seek and be granted 26 consecutive weeks' maternity leave subject to the following conditions:

- a) the maternity leave must commence not later than two weeks before the expected date of birth and end not earlier than four weeks after the expected date of birth.
- b) the graduate student must notify their Supervisor/Course Co-ordinator in



writing as soon as reasonably practicable, but not later than four weeks before the commencement of maternity leave, of their intention to take maternity leave.

6.4.1.2 Additionally, not later than the time of the above notification, they are obliged to supply the Supervisor/Course Co-ordinator with a medical certificate confirming the pregnancy and specifying the expected date of birth. The Supervisor/Course Coordinator must then immediately forward her request for leave to the Dean of Graduate Studies. For postgraduate students this is likely to mean applying to the Dean of Graduate Studies to go off-books.

6.4.1.3 The supervisor must draw the student's attention to the following information relating to funding.

- <https://www.revenue.ie/en/tax-professionals/tdm/income-tax-capital-gains-tax-corporation-tax/part-07/07-01-26.pdf>.
- [https://research.ie/assets/uploads/2017/05/IRC-Policy-on-Leave-for-Parents-and-Carers\\_April-2022.pdf](https://research.ie/assets/uploads/2017/05/IRC-Policy-on-Leave-for-Parents-and-Carers_April-2022.pdf)
- [https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/gender/SFI-Maternity\\_Adoptive-Policy-V2.3-Sept-2019.pdf](https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/gender/SFI-Maternity_Adoptive-Policy-V2.3-Sept-2019.pdf)
- <https://www.tcd.ie/hr/assets/pdf/procedure23-maternity-leave.pdf>

It is also important for non-EU students to be aware of the consequences of going "off books" in relation to their visas.

6.4.1.4 A graduate student undertaking a thesis/dissertation may, if they choose, take up to four consecutive weeks' additional maternity leave immediately after their maternity leave subject to the following condition: they should give reasonable notice to her Supervisor/Course Coordinator of her intention to do so at the same time as they gives notification of their intention to take maternity leave, but not later than four weeks before the date on which the Maternity Leave is due to terminate.

6.4.1.5 The Supervisor/Course Coordinator must inform the Dean of Graduate Studies of the graduate student's intention.

6.4.1.6 Graduate students on maternity leave will be considered "off-books" and appropriate adjustments will be made in relation to their submission dates and completion times.

6.4.1.7 Postgraduate students undertaking a taught course or an obligatory taught element of another class of degree and who seek and are granted maternity will normally be placed off-books for that course, being allowed to return to it at the first available opportunity (normally either in a year's time for full-time courses or in two years' time for part-time courses).

6.4.1.8 Such students must inform their personal tutor, supervisor, course co-ordinator, or Postgraduate Advisory Service of their pregnancy who must, in turn, immediately forward the request for leave to the Dean of Graduate Studies

6.4.1.9 Those who do not wish to take maternity leave but whose babies are due to be delivered before the end of the academic year need to draw up a reasonable and flexible plan in conjunction with their School, tutor, supervisor, or Postgraduate Advisory Service. As courses programmes vary from School to School and Faculty to Faculty it is not possible to outline the scenarios below. However, examinations and assignment deadlines and professional accreditation requirements should be taken into



consideration.

#### 6.4.2 Postgraduate students seeking paternity or adoptive leave

6.4.2.1 Paternity leave for students undertaking a thesis/ dissertation is available by application to the Dean of Graduate Studies on ad misericordiam grounds relating to the pregnancy of their partner, for a maximum of four weeks only. Students requiring more extended periods must apply to go “off-books”.

6.4.2.2 Adoptive leave of 16 weeks duration is available to one adoptive parent from the time the child is placed with the parents.

6.4.2.3 Adoptive partners may also apply for adoptive leave of 4 weeks’ duration. Students must notify their supervisor, course co-ordinator in writing as soon as reasonably practicable, but normally not later than four weeks before the commencement of adoptive leave, of their intention to take adoptive leave.

6.4.2.4 Postgraduate students undertaking a taught course or an obligatory taught element of another class of degree and who seek and are granted paternity or adoptive leave will normally be placed off-books for that course, being allowed to return to it at the first available opportunity (normally either in a year's time for full-time courses or in two years’ time for part-time courses)

6.4.2.5 The Supervisor/Course Co-ordinator must immediately forward their request for leave to the Dean of Graduate Studies.

## 7. Responsibility

7.1 Responsibility for the review of the policy lies with the Dean of Students.

7.2 The Dean of Students shall ensure this policy is circulated annually to relevant stakeholders listed in Appendix 1.

7.3 The roles and responsibilities of relevant offices and individuals, including students, are listed in Appendix 2.

## 8. Related Documents

8.1 [University Calendar, Undergraduate Studies – Part II](#), and

8.2 [University Calendar, Graduate Studies and Higher Degrees – Part III](#)

## 9. Document/version Control

Approved by: Board

Date policy approved: 6 November 2013

Date reviewed policy approved: 8 June 2023 (by University Council)

Date of next review: June 2025



## **Appendix 1 – Annual circulation List**

List of College areas and individuals to which the policy should be circulated annually by the Dean of Students:

The Senior Tutor and the Senior Tutor's Office

The Tutors

The Postgraduate Advisory Service

The Associate Vice Provost for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Senior Lecturer/ Dean of Undergraduate Studies

The Dean of Graduate Studies

The Equality Officer

Heads of School

School Managers

Directors of Undergraduate Teaching & Learning (Undergraduate)

Directors of Postgraduate Teaching & Learning (Postgraduate)

Manager, Day Nursery

Mature Students Officer

Trinity Global

The Junior Dean

The Warden of Trinity Hall

The Registrar of Chambers

The Students' Unions

Postgraduate Representatives

Director, College Health Service

Director, Student Counselling Services

Director, Trinity Disability Service

Director, Trinity Access Programmes

Coordinator, Student Learning Development

Coordinator, Student 2 Student

The Chaplains

The general student population through a planned communications campaign including social media, SU emails, websites, and posters.





## **Appendix 2 – Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Tutors, the Senior Tutor's Office and the Postgraduate Advisory Service**

Tutors, the Senior Tutor's Office and the Postgraduate Advisory Service are often the first people a student approaches with a problem. Thus they are in a particularly important position to advise and guide students. This role includes:

- Responding sensitively, non-judgmentally and promptly to any student who is facing a particular challenge with pregnancy, parental or caring responsibilities.
- Seeking advice from the Senior Tutor's Office (Tutors).
- Familiarising themselves with this policy.
- Ensuring students are treated with dignity and respect at all times.
- Providing referrals e.g. the Student Counselling Services, College Health Service or reputable external services
- Approaching the Head of School or supervisor on the student's behalf with the student's permission to discuss academic impact and formulate a management plan.

### **The University**

Trinity will make reasonable endeavours to ensure that:

- Sufficient information is provided about the essential requirements of a programme of study for a prospective student to make an informed decision about whether the programme is realistic for him/her in the light of their caring responsibilities.
- Any student who has responsibility for the care of one or more children or dependent adults before or during a period of study at the College is accommodated as far as practicable to allow him/her to complete their programme of study, providing academic standards are upheld.
- Relevant staff are made aware of the terms of this policy and their responsibilities arising under it.
- Staff in the Equality Office are available to discuss with staff the best way to support the continuing study of such a student to ensure they are able to complete their programme of study.
- Appropriate support is available to students through various support services.
- The policy is kept under review and updated as necessary.

### **Schools**

Schools must ensure that:

- The policy is widely publicised and available to staff and students.
- Wherever practicable, reasonable accommodations are made to ensure that



students are able to complete their programme of study.

- Students are given information on other sources of advice/support.

### **Individual staff members**

All individual staff members are advised to:

- Familiarise themselves with this policy and the College's responsibilities towards students who disclose caring responsibilities.
- Individual staff members to whom caring responsibilities are disclosed are responsible for: Reading the policy and, in particular, becoming familiar with the procedure for supporting pregnant students and students with dependants.
- Treating any disclosure of caring responsibilities seriously and making students aware of appropriate sources of support.
- Discussing with the student how the pregnancy and/or the caring responsibilities might impact on their programme of study. This may be particularly important on programmes leading to professional registration.
- Respecting students' rights to confidentiality and verifying that students have no objections to their situation being discussed with others.
- Ensuring accurate information is given to prospective students regarding the availability of support for students with dependants.
- Seeking advice from colleagues or College support services.

### **Students**

Students who wish to avail of reasonable accommodations laid out in this policy are responsible for:

- Disclosing their situation to a member of staff (usually their personal tutor, supervisor, course co-ordinator, or Postgraduate Advisory Service) or to the relevant Students' Union including giving an indication of the anticipated impact on their studies. It should be noted that disclosure to a Students' Union is not disclosure to the College, as the Students' Unions are separate legal entities.
- Ensuring the safe supervision of any child or adult dependent they may bring onto campus.
- Reading the policy in order to understand the College's approach to supporting students with dependents.
- Ensuring 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 any absences resulting from their caring responsibilities.