Union Theological College

Student Maternity, Paternity/Partner Support and Adoption Policy

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1. Introduction and Scope of Policy

This Policy provides advice and guidance on issues related to study, health and safety, and finance to:

i. Students who become pregnant during their studies; prospective students who are already pregnant when they commence study; students who have given birth within the previous 26 weeks (or are continuing to breastfeed)

ii. Their partners and those who have recently become parents (e.g. through adoption).

iii. College staff who may have a role in advising students coming to them with these issues.

2. Principles

The College believes that becoming pregnant or caring for a child should not, in itself, be a barrier to applying for, starting in, or completing a programme of study at Union Theological College. The College is committed to being as flexible as possible; making sure no student is disadvantaged, whilst ensuring academic standards are not compromised.
The health and safety of a pregnant student will be of paramount importance at all times, and the College will deal with all students covered by this Policy in a sensitive, non-judgmental and confidential manner, providing context and advice to students to enable informed student choices. Only members of staff who need to be informed for valid reasons will be informed of a student's circumstances and this will normally be done with the student's prior consent.

3. Informing the College of Pregnancy

Students are under no obligation to inform the College if they are pregnant, have given birth within the previous 26 weeks (or are continuing to breastfeed), or become parents while at the College. However, the College can only make provision for students who have disclosed their circumstances. Students are therefore strongly encouraged to disclose relevant details at the earliest opportunity to ensure that any health and safety and/or other support measures can be put in place.

Students are encouraged to consider the following when making a decision about when to inform the College:

i. If a student's pregnancy-related absence (for example, for antenatal appointments) impacts significantly on the student's studies, the College will only be able to take account of the reasons for the absence if they are notified of these. This is particularly relevant to Ministry or Deaconess students who have to fulfil the General Assembly requirement of 100% attendance.

ii. In some cases, a student's pregnancy-related absence from the College will need to be discussed with other external parties, e.g. the Council for Training in Ministry for Ministry students and for Deaconess students.

iii. In some circumstances the absence of a student from the College can adversely affect the work of other students, for example within a group project. Notification can ensure that plans are put in place to deal with any such issues arising from the absence.

iv. If a student is on placement or scheduled to go on placement, arrangements may need to be changed. This is particularly relevant to Ministry or Deaconess students.

4. Risk Management and Study Support Plan

Once a student has made contact to inform the College of maternity, paternity/partner support, or adoption circumstances, the Senior Executive Academic Administrator or a nominee will arrange a meeting with the student, normally within 5 working days of the date of notification. The meeting will discuss/identify potential options for study support and, if appropriate, a risk management plan.

Ministry or Deaconess students will meet with the Dean of Ministerial Studies and Development (DMSD) or the Programme Coordinator for the Deaconess Training Programme to ensure that the requirements of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland are taken account of in any study support plan.

Students will be given an opportunity to reflect on potential study support options, while taking account of financial and health and safety considerations, then have a follow-up meeting with the designated staff member to agree a written study support plan. This plan should be retained by the student and the Senior Executive Academic Administrator or nominee, and shared with other relevant staff requiring this information, with the student's permission.

Students should meet regularly with the Senior Executive Academic Administrator or nominee to review the study support plan and to assess the effectiveness of any special arrangements put in place. Where necessary, further adjustments can be considered.

4.1 Study Support

Study support issues may include options regarding:

i. Arrangements for periods of absence and for the student to catch-up on lectures/tutorials missed for pregnancy/birth related reasons, to ensure the student is not at an academic disadvantage.

ii. Adjusting timescales/deadlines for assessed coursework if the pregnancy or birth prevents compliance.

iii. Seeking approval, as appropriate, from the College for alternative means of assessment for the student (for example, a written assessment instead of a presentation) if the pregnancy or birth prevents the normal methods of assessment.

iv. Allowing the student first attempt re-sits at future examination periods, for example in a situation in which the pregnancy or birth prevents the student from taking an examination at the normal time for the programme of study.

v. The student taking a leave of absence, normally for a pre-determined amount of time. Any student who has given birth must not return to the College within two weeks of giving birth for health and safety reasons. Where a period of temporary withdrawal is required, this should be applied for through the Leave of Absence policy.

vi. Reintegration to the programme of study on return from any prolonged absence. This may also include consideration of a transfer to part-time study, where appropriate. However, this may not be possible for Ministry or Deaconess students who must discuss this with the DMSD/Programme Coordinator for the Deaconess Training Programme.

4.2 For International Students

i. The College is likely to be required by UKVI to stop sponsorship of a Tier 4 visa holder if undertaking a leave of absence for more than 60 days. Such students may be required to return to their home country for the duration of the leave of absence.

ii. International students with a financial sponsor should contact their sponsor and agree amended arrangements.

5. Students Whose Partner is Pregnant or Adopting

Students discovering that they are to become fathers, or partners of a pregnant student, who expect to be responsible for raising the child with the mother, will be entitled to request time out of study. This may include time off for medical appointments prior to, and after the birth, as well as a period of paternity support/shared parental leave of up to 50 weeks following the birth. Students in this situation should contact their Personal Tutor, Supervisor or other staff member, to discuss this and draw up a study support plan, where appropriate. Ministry students must discuss this option with the DMSD.

For international students in this position, it is important that specific advice is sought from the Operations Manager in relation to visa constraints before making any arrangements, including taking time out from study or an extended leave of absence.

Ten days' 'ordinary' paternity/partner leave may be granted to students who are the biological father of the child, or the mother's husband or partner. The leave should be taken in blocks of not less than one week within 3 months of the birth of the child. Ministry students should contact the DMSD to agree when this leave should be taken.

6. Adoption

Students about to become parents (e.g. through adoption) should inform the College of their circumstances as soon as possible. Arrangements can be made to allow time out of study, in line with sections 4 and 5 above, as appropriate. This may vary depending on the age of the child, the programme of study being undertaken, and the point in the academic year at which the adoption takes place.

7. Stillbirth and Miscarriage

The College recognises that a situation such as stillbirth and miscarriage can be an upsetting and traumatic experience for both partners. In these circumstances, students may wish to take time out from study and are encouraged to seek confidential counselling and talk confidentially to their Personal Tutor or another member of College staff.

8. Supporting Information

8.1 Access to College Facilities

All students on maternity leave, paternity/partner support leave or adoption leave will retain their access to their College email accounts, the College's electronic resources, and the College Library. Students on a period of leave of absence are not normally supposed to be studying, and are not entitled to teaching, supervision or other academic provision.

Where there is concern about knowledge of the field being affected by the length of maternity related or adoption related absence for postgraduate research students, the College will take steps to ensure that the student is kept up to date with developments in the field. Examples include sending lists of key reading and new research, and taking steps to ensure access to key journals.

8.2 Financial Considerations

i. **Tuition Fees**
If a student decides to either permanently withdraw or take a temporary leave of absence from the College, tuition fees will be calculated with reference to the tuition fees liability dates set out in the Union Theological College Tuition Fees Policy.

ii. **Funding**

Undergraduate students in receipt of funding from any statutory body, for example Student Finance NI, should contact the relevant funding body for advice on fee and maintenance loan related issues.

Undergraduate students who choose to take maternity leave should note that financial support from funding bodies, such as from Student Finance NI, may stop when the leave begins.

Ministry and Deaconess students will need to contact the DMSD/Programme Coordinator for the Deaconess Training Programme to discuss the funding provided from the Students' Bursary Fund or Presbyterian Women.

iii. **Financial Advice and Support**

Students may be eligible for Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) or Maternity Allowance (MA), which is determined based on employment records. Further information can be found at www.nidirect.gov.uk/ (http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/)

International students with a financial sponsor should contact their sponsor for information on any support that may be available.

8.3 Babies/Children on Campus

Due to potential disruption for the parent and other students, it is not considered appropriate for babies and children to be present at lectures, seminars or other teaching activities. Students must ensure that they have suitable childcare arrangements in place at times when they are expected to be at College.
For any babies born to international students who require immigration permission to be in the UK, there may be immigration requirements for the new baby. Students should contact the Operations Manager for specific advice in relation to this.

8.4 Breastfeeding

Nursing mothers should be aware that there are no dedicated facilities for expressing milk on campus and that if they wish to make such arrangements, they should contact the Senior Executive Academic Administrator. If nursing mothers wish to breastfeed on campus, arrangements should be made through the Senior Executive Academic Administrator.