

Supporting pregnant students Policy and Procedure

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1. THE POLICY

1.1 Introduction

Wirral Met College is committed to an ethos of equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging. The College recognises pregnancy and maternity as a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 and will ensure students are not disadvantaged as a result of pregnancy, maternity leave or responsibilities associated with becoming a parent. The Children and Families Act 2014, Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, and other relevant legislation also underpin this policy.

1.2 Aim

To ensure a consistent approach to supporting students who are pregnant, or have recently become parents, and wherever possible, to enable them to achieve their educational goals. This includes minimising any risk to the expectant parent or unborn child, providing support to enable the student to continue learning or to take a break in learning as appropriate, and to signpost the student to any potential sources of external support they may benefit from.

1.3 Scope

This policy applies to all students enrolled at the College who are pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or have recently given birth, as well as any student whose partner/spouse this applies to. It also includes guidance for staff supporting these students.

1.4 Responsibilities

Senior Leadership Team

- Ensure this policy is implemented and reviewed annually
- Promote an inclusive environment that supports pregnant students

Heads of Department

- Act as the primary point of contact for pregnant students
- Develop an individualised support plan in consultation with the student
- Coordinate with relevant departments to ensure reasonable adjustments are implemented and reviewed

Delivery Staff

- Foster an inclusive classroom environment
- Implement agreed-upon adjustments for pregnant students
- Respect the confidentiality of the student's circumstances

2. THE PROCEDURE

2.1 Notification of Pregnancy

While students are not required to disclose their pregnancy, if a student chooses to notify the College, they should do so as early as possible to allow for appropriate support and adjustments. The relevant Head of Department must be informed when a student discloses that they are pregnant. Early disclosure also enables the College to provide timely advice and guidance regarding the student's individual circumstances, programme requirements, and any reasonable adjustments that may support their continued participation and achievement. Where there is a risk that pregnancy, maternity leave, or related circumstances may affect a student's ability to successfully complete their programme, the College will work with the student to explore available options, including additional support, alternative study arrangements, or more suitable programmes where appropriate, ensuring that decisions are informed, student-centred, and free from discrimination.

2.2 Initial Meeting

Once pregnancy is disclosed, a meeting will be arranged between the student and a member of staff from the Student Services team or another appropriate staff member. The purpose of this meeting will be to discuss the student's individual needs, review any necessary academic adjustments, and create a personalised support plan. Emergency contact details should be checked with the student to ensure these are still correct and up to date on the college system.

2.3 Data Protection/confidentiality

Some students may not wish to share openly the fact that they are pregnant but may still disclose it to a member of staff to seek support.

The fact that a student is pregnant must not be shared openly without the student's consent and must only be shared with other staff on an individual basis, for the purpose of managing risk in line with the relevant Risk Assessments.

2.4 Health and Safety Risk Assessment

The Head of Department, supported by relevant specialists where necessary, will ensure a pregnancy risk assessment is completed, documented and reviewed regularly. Where a student is undertaking a work placement, industry placement, apprenticeship off-the-job learning activity, or external practical activity, the College will work with the placement provider to ensure appropriate risk assessments and adjustments are in place.

2.5 Communication with delivery and support staff

Once an individual support plan has been agreed upon, delivery staff and relevant support staff will be informed, with the student's consent, to ensure any adjustments or accommodations are put in place and that communication remains open. Support plans will be reviewed at agreed intervals throughout the pregnancy and following return to study to ensure support remains appropriate.

2.6 Reasonable Adjustments

Adaptations to the curriculum may be needed to support the student.

The Head of Department must ensure due consideration is given to any reasonable adaptations, on a case-by-case basis, including:

- Time off to attend medical appointments (including enabling a student to support their pregnant partner at medical appointments)
- Remote learning on a temporary/occasional basis if required either during the pregnancy, or after the child is born
- Pregnancy-related absences will be considered separately from general attendance monitoring processes, where appropriate, and will be supported through agreed reasonable adjustments
- Extended deadlines for assignments and exams (agreed in advance and in line with awarding organisation guidelines)
- Alternative assessment arrangements (e.g., online assessments etc)
- Allowing the student to take regular breaks when needed, to eat, move, or use the toilet
- Allowing the student to transfer to a smaller qualification if applicable (in consultation with MIS and the relevant Curriculum Director)
- Allowing the student to take a break in learning and return to complete their course after the pregnancy. This would consider any restrictions set by the awarding body and any limitations due to change of planned curriculum offer in the college. (in consultation with MIS and the relevant Curriculum Director)
- Allowing the student to withdraw, and re-start their place at the college after the pregnancy (in consultation with MIS and the relevant Curriculum Director)
- Making reasonable adjustments to the student's timetable and/or attendance expectations to accommodate breast feeding/expressing of milk once the baby is born, as required.
- Having regular one-to-one meetings with programme delivery staff to monitor the student's welfare upon their return to college
- Access to additional support services, such as academic tutoring or counselling

2.7 Maternity Leave and Absence

Pregnant students may be entitled to maternity leave or time off due to health-related issues arising from pregnancy. The student should inform the College as soon as possible if they need to take time away from their studies, and appropriate arrangements will be made for their absence, including options to extend deadlines or defer assessments. The student will also be provided with information on how to manage any necessary deferral of courses or qualifications.

Students wishing to return to study after maternity leave should meet with the Head of Department to discuss the best approach for re-engagement and ongoing support.

2.8 Support Services

Pregnant students will be encouraged to access available support services, including:

- Financial support
- Housing support
- Signposting to Family Nurse Partnership, GP and other medical services
- Referral to the Mental Health & Wellbeing team if necessary
- Peer support groups or networks for student parents

2.9 Breast feeding

If, after returning to college following the birth, the student needs support to enable breast feeding or expressing of milk, appropriate arrangements will be offered to facilitate this.

In such circumstances, the student should contact Reception in advance so that appropriate arrangements can be made (e.g. identification of a suitable room if required by the student).

2.10 Safeguarding

Occasionally, a student pregnancy may be an indicator of a safeguarding concern, for a range of reasons including:

- Student indicates the pregnancy is a result of rape or sexual exploitation
- Staff are concerned as to the student's capacity to choose to have or care for a baby, e.g. due to their particular learning difficulties
- There are pre-existing known safeguarding concerns about the student's home environment or personal circumstances
- Any safeguarding concerns must be reported in the usual way, and in line with the college Safeguarding Policy & Procedure

3. RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Policy
- Safeguarding, Protection and Promoting the Welfare of Children & Adults at Risk Policy and Procedure