

Supporting Student Parents & Carers

Action Plan Reference: MCFW2



Created comprehensive support framework ensuring student parents and carers can continue studies without disadvantage, with formal guidance, paid leave policies, and individualised support plans.

Rationale

This initiative addressed the lack of clarity and guidance for student pregnancy and student parents/carers at Lancaster University. The working group was established in response to:

- Athena Swan action plan requirement to develop maternity/parental leave policy for PGR students.
- Feedback from students and staff about insufficient support and unclear guidance.
- Need to ensure compliance with Equality Act 2010 treating pregnancy and maternity as protected characteristics.

What we did

We reviewed good practice across the sector and held student parent focus groups (May 2021) to inform new guidance on pregnancy, maternity, parental support, and adoption. Paid leave for LU-funded postgraduate researchers was introduced, aligned with the UKRI offer, and templates for Inclusive Learning Support Plans and risk assessments were developed. A central approval system was established to ensure consistency. This work involved collaboration with LUSU, Faculty EDI Committees, student services, academic teams, and student parents. It was delivered through working groups, consultations, policy development, and the creation of webpages and a parent support group via LUSU.

Intersectional Dimensions



- Gender
- Caring responsibilities
- Visa / immigration status
- Funding status
- Disability

“The working group received strong support from departments and colleges.”



Cultural Change



Stability - Moved from ad-hoc support to systematic, formal guidance.



Equity - Created institutional recognition that caring responsibilities should not be a barrier for academic success.



Empowerment - Established principle of individualised planning around specific student needs.



Inclusion - Embedded pregnancy and parental support into standard University procedures.



Reflection Question

"How could comprehensive support frameworks for student parents and carers be implemented or enhanced in your area?"

IMPACT

Stakeholder Consultation

Evidence based

Process Integration

Practical Tools

Leadership & Governance



Created dedicated webpages with comprehensive information and guidance



Established student parents support group via LUSU



All students now retain library borrowing rights and IT access during intercalation



The central approval system ensures oversight of all students requiring support



Strong support received from departments and colleges during consultation

What Worked Well

Involving faculties, services, and student groups built broad support and ensured the policy reflected community needs.

Insights from student focus groups and good practice from other universities gave the work credibility and relevance.

Embedding parental support into current systems made the approach more sustainable and manageable.

Templates, flowcharts, and risk assessments supported consistent practice and gave staff confidence.

Endorsement by the EDI Committee and approval through SEC gave the work authority and visibility.

Broader Reach

The policy now extends beyond PGR students to cover all UG and PG students, reflecting the University's wider EDI commitments and alignment with Athena Swan principles. This work contributes to sector best practice, demonstrates institutional commitment to equality and inclusion, and offers a model that other HEIs could replicate.

Challenges

Supporting student parents and carers requires flexible, case-by-case approaches to address complex individual circumstances. Key challenges included balancing academic standards with reasonable adjustments, addressing intersectional needs such as visa status, funding, and disability, maintaining confidentiality while enabling appropriate information sharing, and coordinating efforts across multiple services and departments.

Next Steps

- 3-year review cycle established (next review 2025).
- Ongoing monitoring of policy effectiveness through student feedback.
- Continuous staff training on new procedures.
- Regular review of reasonable adjustments and support offerings.
- Integration with broader EDI initiatives.

Find Out More



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[Student Parents and Carers Webpages](#)