

Supporting Families Policy (Research Students)

Document Control Table

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Version 3 updates:	
Point 6	Deletion: 'Maternity/adoption leave pay is given'
Point 12	Deletion: 'Paternity leave pay is given'
Point 16	<p>The shared parental leave period was changed from 52 weeks to 50 weeks</p> <p>Addition: 'The first 2 weeks compulsory maternity leave cannot be shared' was added.</p> <p>The final sentence was updated to read 'Students on shared parental leave will take suspension from study on the same basis as they would for maternity or adoption leave.'</p>

Supporting Families Policy (Research Students)

Who does this policy apply to?

This policy applies to postgraduate research (PGR) students at GCU.

The policy is intended to provide information to:

- PGR students who become pregnant or adopt a child during their studies, their spouses/partners and students who have children under the age of 18.
- Staff who may have a role in supporting or advising PGR students, including but not limited to; Supervisors, Director of Studies, Postgraduate Research Tutors, Senior Postgraduate Research Tutors, Associate Deans Research and Research Administrators.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the [Student Pregnancy and Maternity Policy](#).

What types of leave does this policy cover?

This policy covers the following types of family leave:

Maternity Leave	A period of absence granted to a mother before and after the birth of her child.
Paternity Leave	A period of absence granted to spouses and partners of those giving birth or adopting a child.
Adoption Leave	A period of absence granted to an adopter when they have been matched with a child through an adoption agency.
Shared Parental Leave	This provides a way for parents who share the main responsibility for the care of a child at the time of birth, or placement for adoption, to share the total period of leave available.
Parental Leave	Parental leave is the right to take unpaid time off to look after your child up to their 18th birthday.

Maternity Leave

1. All PGR students are entitled to up to 52 weeks of maternity or adoption leave. During this period, their PGR study will be suspended and their submission date altered accordingly. The period of compulsory maternity leave is 2 weeks.
2. As with all periods of suspension, no fees will be charged to the student during the period of maternity or adoption leave.
3. To qualify the student must inform the University of their pregnancy by the end of the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth, submit a MATB1 (Maternity Certificate – provided by your midwife or doctor after the 20-week scan), and advise of the intended start date of the maternity leave.
4. For international students holding a Student Route (previously Tier 4) Visa, the maximum permission to suspend studies, while remaining in the UK, is 60 days. However, an international student may choose to add their annual leave to this up to a maximum of 90 days for visa sponsorship to continue.
 - 4.1. Under exceptional circumstances international students can be granted permission to suspend their studies and remain in the UK for more than 60 days in the event of being unable to resume their studies or unfit to travel home. In this case, sponsorship of the Student Route visa continues. This does not include normal pre- and post-delivery leave and requires medical evidence of additional health issues.
 - 4.2. International students can choose to suspend their studies and leave the UK for the maximum maternity leave permitted under this policy but this will result in withdrawal of their visa sponsorship. VISA Reporting will notify the UKVI and their visa will be curtailed (stopped). The student would then apply for a new Student Route Visa to return to the UK and resume their studies when ready.

Student Route/Tier 4 Visa holders who have any questions regarding the impact of maternity, paternity, shared parental or adoption leave upon their immigration status should seek advice from the VISA team at the very earliest opportunity. For contact details or to make an appointment, please visit the [VISA Team's Contact Us webpage](#).
5. For GCU funded students (Home and RUK status), including students whose award is jointly funded by GCU and another funder, where the expected week of childbirth will occur during the period of their award (based upon 3 years full-time), the first 6 months of suspension due to maternity will be paid at full stipend rate with up to 6 months, additionally, unpaid. Part-time GCU funded (and partially funded) students will have the first 6 months paid at their normal pro-rata stipend rate, and the following 6 months unpaid.
6. Maternity/adoption pay is given in addition to the student's stipend award. On their return to study the student's stipend payments will restart and continue for the duration of their award period, as stated in their offer letter.

7. International GCU funded students, should contact their School Associate Dean of Research at the earliest opportunity to discuss their individual situation.
8. PGR students on externally funded studentships will follow the funder's regulations on studentship payment during suspension of study due to pregnancy. Where funding support and suspension periods for childbirth or adoption leave within externally funded studentships are either not detailed or fall short of the GCU studentship level of support, then we would seek, with discussion with the external funders, to bring the student support (in time and stipend) to the same level as for university funded studentships. This would be undertaken on a case by case basis in conjunction with the funder. Each case will be considered by the School Associate Dean of Research and the Director of the Graduate School.
9. Up to 6 months leave can be taken in the case of stillbirth or miscarriage after the 24th week of pregnancy. University studentships will continue to be paid at the full stipend rate for up to 6 months. This leave pay is given in addition to the student's stipend award. On their return to study the student's stipend payments will restart and continue for the duration of their award period, as stated in their offer letter. As with all periods of suspension, no fees will be charged to the student during the period of this leave.

Paternity Leave

10. Spouses/partners are entitled to up to 10 days paternity leave. Spouses/partners who are in receipt of a GCU studentship will have their stipend paid during this period of paternity leave. During this period their PGR study will be suspended and their submission date altered accordingly.
11. As with all periods of suspension, no fees will be charged to the student during the period of paternity leave.
12. Paternity pay is given in addition to the student's stipend award. On their return to study the student's stipend payments will restart and continue for the duration of their award period, as stated in their offer letter.

Adoption Leave

13. Adoption leave provision mirrors the maternity leave and pay entitlement set out in this policy.

A PGR student will be eligible for adoption leave provided they meet the following criteria:

- an adoption agency has given written notice that it has matched the student with a child for adoption,
- the adoption agency has given a date on which it expects to place a child into the student's care with a view to adoption (the 'Expected Placement Date'),
- the student has notified the adoption agency that they agree that the child should be placed with them, and agree with the Expected Placement Date, and
- the student's spouse/partner will not be taking adoption leave from their institution/employer.

14. For GCU funded students (Home and RUK status), including students whose award is jointly funded by GCU and another funder, where the expected placement date will occur during the period of their award (based upon 3 years full-time), the first 6-months of suspension due to adoption will be paid at full stipend rate with up to 6 months, additionally, unpaid. Part-time GCU funded (and partially funded) students will have the first 6 months of adoption leave paid at their normal pro-rata stipend rate, and the following 6 months unpaid.

Shared Parental Leave

15. Those entitled to share parental leave are the person giving birth to the baby/the primary adopter and their spouse, civil partner or partner, who will share responsibility for the child's upbringing.
16. Where both parents are GCU PGR students the university would consider positively a joint application for shared parental leave. The shared parental leave period is up to a maximum of 50 weeks shared between the two parents (not 50 weeks for each parent). The first 2 weeks compulsory maternity leave cannot be shared. In the case of GCU funded PGR students this would include up to 6 months paid leave at the full stipend rate. Students on shared parental leave will take suspension from study on the same basis as they would for maternity or adoption leave.

Parental Leave

17. All PGR students are entitled to up to 18 weeks unpaid leave for each child in their family, up to the child's 18th birthday. A maximum of 4 weeks can be taken per year.

Example reasons for Parental Leave:

- Extending maternity/paternity/adoption leave
- Spending more time with your child, e.g. in early years
- Accompany a child during a stay in hospital
- Checking out new schools or settling a child into new childcare arrangements
- Enabling a family to spend more time together, such as taking a child to stay with their grandparents

18. During periods of parental leave, the student's PGR study will be suspended and their submission date altered accordingly. As with all periods of suspension, no fees will be charged to the student during the period of parental leave.

How to apply for leave

19. The student and supervisor should submit the Application for Suspension of Studies (previously RDC3s) in the Student Information Management System portal (SIMS). Template forms and guidance are available on the [Graduate School's Research Degrees Progression webpage](#). The application will be referred to the [School Research Progression and Awards Board](#) as per the normal process for suspension to cover the duration of the absence.

20. Where the student is asked for the reason for the suspension request, they should state the type of leave they wish to request as detailed in the Supporting Families Policy and provide certificate evidence (MATB1 or Matching Certificate).
21. Upon return to their studies, the suspension will end and for funded students, the research studentship award payments will restart and continue for the remaining duration of the funded period.
22. All students (funded and self-funded) will also have their target dates for submission of Application for Confirmation of Progression (previously RDC2) and Submission of Doctoral Thesis (previously RDC8) along with their maximum registration end date extended by the period of the suspension.