



# The Church of Scotland

## **Faith Nurture Forum – Initial Ministerial Education (IME) Student Policy**

### **Students as Parents**

#### **1. Introduction**

The Equality Act 2010 extended the protection from discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy and maternity to women outside the workplace and now includes students. Under the Act it is unlawful to discriminate against students in relation to admissions; the provision of education; access to benefits, facility or service.

The Faith Nurture Forum of The Church of Scotland (Faith Nurture Forum) is committed to ensuring that the principles of the Act are applied fairly to all students, to ensuring a flexible approach to studies and individuals, and to facilitating an inclusive, supportive environment for all students where there is a positive balance between their home life and student life.

#### **2. Purpose and Scope**

This policy covers any student who is or becomes pregnant, or takes maternity absence during her studies, and students who are about to become parents. It also covers any student who is the partner (including same sex partner) of someone who is pregnant and expects to be responsible for the child, and any person becoming a parent of a child e.g. adoption.

Where the student to whom this policy applies is studying at one of our partner universities, we will work with all parties to ensure a coordinated approach.

#### **3. Policy statement**

Faith Nurture Forum is committed to ensuring that it adheres fully to all aspects of the Equality Act 2010, and especially that does not treat a student less favourably than other students on the grounds of pregnancy, maternity or paternity.

As Faith Nurture Forum is committed to being inclusive, it wishes to support students who are pregnant, and where they go on to be parents, to ensure that a study/life balance is maintained and therefore will be flexible according to the needs of each student.

The health and safety of a pregnant student is paramount and Faith Nurture Forum will ensure that students covered by this policy are dealt with in a sensitive and confidential manner. Information concerning a student's pregnancy will be treated sensitively and be passed on only with the student's consent. However, the student should be aware that there are times when it is in the best interest of the student that Faith Nurture Forum may need to contact other people on the student's behalf.

#### **4. For students who become pregnant during their studies**

##### **4.1 Confirming the Pregnancy**

A student who has a confirmed pregnancy should make Faith Nurture Forum aware of her pregnancy. This is in order for Faith Nurture Forum to provide support to the pregnant student, both in terms of academic support for study, but also to offer practical support e.g. to carry out a risk assessment, make any arrangements regards placement. A Training Officer from Faith Nurture Forum will act as their main point of contact for all matters.

#### **4.2 Time off - maternity absence**

Time off will almost certainly be needed for ante-natal appointments prior to the birth of the baby. If Faith Nurture Forum needs to take into consideration the impact of the student pregnancy on her course attendance or attainment it may be necessary to ask for evidence of appointments and letters from the student's GP, midwife or health worker.

A student will take maternity related absence and should be allowed to decide when they start their maternity-related absence in agreement with Faith Nurture Forum, and dependent on the stage of study, the university. If the student is a probationer, the Faith Nurture Forum will work with the presbytery concerned, however, Faith Nurture Forum will be responsible for making the final decision.

Where a student is close to her due date and unable to continue her studies as planned, the Faith Nurture Forum, in consultation with all parties, may agree to allow her to start her maternity-related absence earlier than planned.

Whilst it is recognised that each request must be dealt with on an individual basis, there are a number of measures that can be used in order to enable the student's continuation of study. These include:

- Allowing time out of study both before and after the birth of the baby;
- Giving permission for periods of absence for ante-natal appointments;
- Making arrangements for the student to catch up on missed studies;
- Showing a degree of flexibility for the student's circumstances where it is difficult for deadlines to be met;
- Offering support to help the student reintegrate to the studies after any period of prolonged absence.

Faith Nurture Forum are not required to grant every request made, although efforts should be made to meet reasonable requests. If any request is refused, the reason for the refusal should be provided in writing for the student.

In order to ensure that arrangements are put in place, the student should notify Faith Nurture Forum, 15 weeks before the expected birth of their child, as to when they would like their maternity absence to commence.

Where specific arrangements are required to be put in place for a student who already has special arrangements in place e.g. on grounds of disability, these should be kept separate to ensure that it is clear which arrangements are in place for the required amount of time.

#### **4.3 Length of maternity-related absence**

At a recommended provision, students should be allowed to take up to one year out of study, however, is able to take less time on maternity related absence. For health and safety reasons, students must not return to studies within 2 weeks of giving birth.

Where there is concern about her knowledge of the field being affected by the length of time that she takes, Faith Nurture Forum in partnership with the university if applicable, should take reasonable steps to ensure that she is kept up to speed with developments in the field.

#### **5. Student Maternity Support Plan**

Faith Nurture Forum will prepare a Student Maternity Support Plan with a student for her maternity leave. To do this, the appointed Training Officer will meet with the student once notified of the pregnancy has been received and at regular, agreed intervals as the pregnancy progresses to both discuss options and continued support in full and to put together the Student Maternity Support Plan to detail:

- Date when the baby is due
- Ante-natal leave arrangements
- Maternity absence arrangements
- Health and Safety
- Finance
- Variations to the mode of study
- Placements
- Assessment and examinations
- Any contact made during maternity absence
- Welcome back arrangements

The student must inform Faith Nurture Forum in writing when she is ready to return and an appropriate timescale for re- integration into her studies will be agreed.

#### **6. Health and Safety**

There are health and safety considerations that arise during pregnancy and breastfeeding and the risks to which students could be exposed need to be assessed.

The highest risk to the baby is during the first 13 weeks of pregnancy. Consequently, students should be encouraged to notify Faith Nurture Forum as early as possible of their pregnancy so that a health and safety assessment can be conducted. This should be undertaken by a member of staff experienced in undertaking maternity and pregnancy risk assessments.

#### **7. Financial implications**

Faith Nurture Forum recognises that student who are parents may face financial pressures or experience difficulties from time to time. Faith Nurture Forum wishes to encourage students who are currently parents, and who may become parents, and students may be able to access specific financial hardship funds. Students in this situation are encouraged to speak to a Training Officer.

Candidates: Students in receipt of a placement grant will retain the grant if on placement while maternity leave starts.

Probationers: Students in receipt of a stipend may be entitled to Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP). To qualify the student would have to have been in receipt of a stipend for 26 weeks leading up to the 15th week before the due date. SMP lasts up to 39 weeks, made up of:

- 6 weeks getting 90% of the students average weekly stipend (before tax) then;
- 33 weeks getting either £145.18 a week or 90% of the students average weekly stipend (before tax) - whichever is less.

Advice on specific individual situations will be sought from Faith Nurture Forum Finance Manager.

### **8. Breast feeding**

Faith Nurture Forum will ensure suitable facilities are made available for nursing mothers to rest, express and store milk. Faith Nurture Forum will work with partners to ensure that this provision is formally assessed as being suitable.

### **9. Miscarriage, still births and neonatal death**

Miscarriage is most likely to occur in the first three months of pregnancy. If a student miscarries, she is most likely to need time off study for tests and to recover. Consideration should be given to the impact of a miscarriage on the student's ability to meet deadlines, undertake placements and sit examinations.

A student who has a still birth or whose baby dies shortly after birth should be entitled to the same length of maternity-related absence, financial and wellbeing support as a student whose baby is not stillborn.

### **10. Support for fathers and partners (including same sex partners) who have responsibility for bringing up the child**

Any student discovering that they are to become a father, or any partner of a pregnant student (including same sex partners) who expect to be responsible for raising the child with the mother, will be entitled to request time out of study.

A student may want to attend antenatal appointments as required or may need time off if their partner has complications with the pregnancy or a serious pregnancy related illness. Early notification to attend antenatal appointments is expected to allow flexibility in making special arrangements.

If a student wants to take paternity related absence they should inform Faith Nurture Forum at least 15 weeks before the baby is due, but a degree of flexibility may be needed. Flexibility will be shown wherever possible.

Faith Nurture Forum will provide up to 2 weeks (14 days) continuous leave once the baby is born. Study will be classed as continuous.

### **11. For students about to become parents through an adoption process**

Students about to become parents e.g. through adoption should inform Faith Nurture Forum of their circumstances as soon as possible. Arrangements can be made to allow time out of study depending on the age of the child, stage of study and the time of the academic year that the adoption will take place.

### **12. Monitoring and Review**

The impact of this policy will be monitored and the policy is subject to amendments as necessary. This policy will be reviewed every two years as a minimum.

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