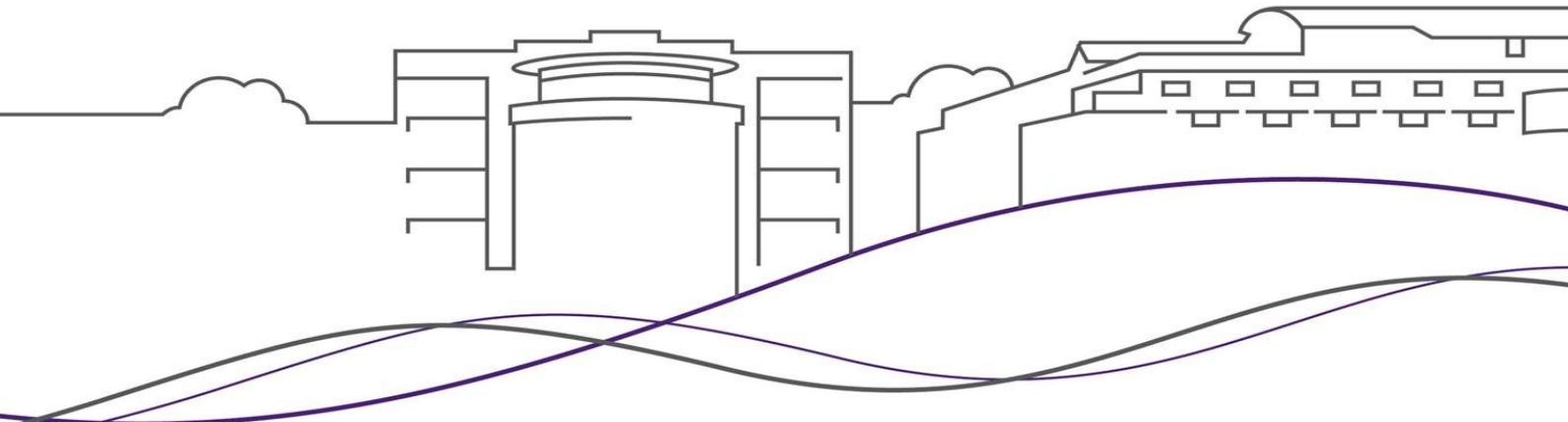
# Academic Policy and Procedure

UCSD UNIVERSITY CENTRE SOUTH DEVON

[ ] South Devon College

**HIGHER EDUCATION**

## Supporting Pregnant Students and Students with Very Young Children Policy (HEAPP13) V1.0



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## 1. Introduction

This document provides students and staff who have a role in advising or supporting students with information about the University Centre South Devon's (UCSD) approach to supporting a student who is pregnant. It also provides some information relating to supporting students (whether female or male) who have recently become parents.

## 2. University Centre South Devon's commitment

UCSD believes that being pregnant or having a very young child should not, in itself, be a barrier to applying for, starting, succeeding in, or completing a programme of study. UCSD is committed to being as flexible as possible, providing academic standards are upheld. Reasonable adjustments which can and should be made for students in these circumstances will vary from programme to programme. However, the general approach to be taken is consistent across the institution – as is the legal framework in which UCSD operates.

This policy is based on a set of important guiding principles, namely:

- Avoiding less favourable treatment. UCSD and its staff will make sure they avoid treating the student (or applicant) less favourably than other students or applicants on the grounds that she is pregnant.

- Taking a flexible approach. As far as is possible, UCSD will take a flexible approach to supporting and facilitating the continued learning of – and maintaining a high-quality and safe student experience for - pregnant students and/or students who are the parents of a very young child. (See Appendix 2 for more guidance on this point). Students will be actively involved in drawing up a support plan (see Appendix 4).

- Demonstrating a non-judgmental and sensitive approach. When supporting and working with students on these matters, staff must take an open-minded and non-judgmental approach and must not attempt to influence a student's decisions. Staff's role is to provide context and advice to the student to enable them to make informed choices.

Information provided by the student should be treated sensitively and only passed onto others on a need-to-know basis (for example, in order to organise appropriate accommodations for the student relating to learning and teaching, assessment, placements, fees etc.).

## 3. Rights and responsibilities

This section covers rights and responsibilities for students, staff and UCSD.

### 3.1 Responsibilities of the Student

A student or applicant who suspects she is pregnant should see her GP to have the pregnancy confirmed as soon as she can.

Students should take responsibility for understanding the specific requirements of their programme of study, and the possible impact of any pregnancy or maternity related absence on arrangements for study and assessment.

Pregnancy and maternity should not in themselves provide a barrier for students starting, continuing or successfully completing their studies. Students will be provided with support and advice from the Support & Wellbeing Team to enable them to make their own informed decisions and to make arrangements for their pregnancy through a detailed Pregnancy and Support Plan.

Students are required to take two weeks compulsory leave of absence immediately following the birth of their child as described in section 4.7. It is an expectation that the student will continue to engage with their studies in the normal way, including attending and submitting work as required. Failure to do so, could have financial impact such as; not meeting bursary terms and conditions.

### 3.2 Informing the University Centre South Devon

Students are strongly encouraged to inform UCSD as soon as possible if they become pregnant or have a child whilst they are a student here. Whilst their Personal Tutor would normally be the first point of contact, students can choose to speak to another member of staff with whom they feel more comfortable. If requested, the Support and Wellbeing Lead Coordinator will identify an appropriate member of staff to liaise with the student (students should note that their Personal Tutor will normally be kept informed of the student's circumstances).

UCSD wishes to support students in their studies and ensure that any risks to mother and child are appropriately addressed, but can only do so if students disclose their circumstances. Accordingly, UCSD cannot accept responsibility for the consequences of non-disclosure if the student opts not to inform it.

In this respect, students should consider the following:

- There may be elements of a programme of study that could present a health and safety risk to a pregnant student and/or her child. The Support and Wellbeing Lead Coordinator will not be able to arrange appropriate risk assessments unless s/he is aware of her pregnancy. (See also section 3.5)
- If a student's pregnancy-related absence (for example, for antenatal appointments) impacts significantly on the student's studies, the Support and Wellbeing Lead Coordinator will only be able to take proper account of the reasons for absence if they are notified of these.
- In some cases, a student's pregnancy-related absence from University might be something that needs to be discussed with other organisations. For example, if a student is in receipt of funding from a Research Council or other external body, she should refer to the terms and conditions relating to her award.

- Sometimes, the absence of a student from University can adversely affect the work of other students s/he is working alongside (for example, on a group project), which might make it more important to notify the HE Faculty Office and/or the Support and Wellbeing Lead Coordinator, so that plans can be made to deal with any such issues arising from the absence.

Ideally, students should inform UCSD of their pregnancy at least 15 weeks before the baby is due. The greatest risk to an unborn baby is during its first 13 weeks and so it is important that the student informs UCSD of her pregnancy as early as possible so that risks can be assessed and any necessary health and safety measures can identified and put in place in a timely fashion. This time frame also allows sufficient time for UCSD to discuss and agree the student support plan (see below), make any necessary arrangements, and ensure information is communicated as required.

When a student informs UCSD that she is pregnant, it is important that she receives consistent, objective and unbiased support and advice to enable her to make informed choices. Not all advice relating to pregnancy and maternity can be provided by UCSD: Appendix 1 contains information on other organisations which students may find helpful.

**In certain subject areas, particularly those which involve a placement in a health or education setting, students may be required to inform the placement provider of their pregnancy. Students should check the programme handbook or contact the HE Faculty for further advice.**

### 3.3 Extenuating Circumstances

Whilst pregnancy itself is not considered to be an extenuating circumstance, there may be circumstances where pregnancy-related issues (e.g. medical conditions associated with the pregnancy) impact on a student's studies/assessment. In these cases, the student must use the extenuating circumstances procedure to report them to UCSD (and provide appropriate supporting evidence, which can be submitted in confidence, if necessary).

Extenuating Circumstances Policy and Procedure can be found here:
https://www.southdevon.ac.uk/university/public-information

### 3.4 Drawing up the Student Support in Pregnancy Plan

Once the student has disclosed her pregnancy, the Programme Manager and Support and Wellbeing Lead Coordinator will meet with the student to discuss how the pregnancy is likely to impact on her study.

A written Student Support in Pregnancy Plan should be drawn up by the Support and Wellbeing Lead Coordinator and the student, detailing any reasonable arrangements required during the student's pregnancy and the agreed timescale for her return to study. A template plan is included at Appendix 4.

In order to inform the drawing up of the Plan, it is essential that a risk assessment is carried out as a matter of urgency (see section 3.5 "Health and Safety" below).

Careful consideration must be given to the variety of ways in which the student can be enabled to continue her studies during her pregnancy or after the birth. For example, these might include:

- The date on which the student intends to start maternity-related absence

- The length of maternity-related absence that the student intends to take and the date on which she intends to return (N.B. in this case, and in that above, these dates may need to be revised as circumstances dictate).
- Advice on where the student can locate material issued/covered in lectures/seminars/tutorials missed for reasons related to the pregnancy e.g. medical appointments.
- Use of the extenuating circumstances procedure in cases where compliance with timescales/deadlines for assessments is affected by a pregnancy- related health condition or birth.
- Exploring the possibility of alternative means of assessment for the student (for example, a written assessment instead of a physical performance) if the pregnancy or birth prevents the normal methods of assessment.
- Any adjustments that may be required if the student will be sitting examinations (e.g. need for regular breaks.)
- The student interrupting her studies for a pre-determined amount of time. This period of interruption may be extended if the time required to complete the programme of study will still fall within the maximum time limit allowed for the programme either by UCSD (and/or, where applicable, professional bodies).
- Consideration of a transfer to part-time study.

The Student Support in Pregnancy Plan should also:

- Accommodate the student's antenatal care (e.g. medical appointments).
- Include a break from attending University of at least two weeks after giving birth for health and safety reasons.
- Include provision for re-integrating the student to the programme of study on return from any prolonged absence.

The student should receive a copy of the Plan, as should other appropriate member(s) of staff requiring this information including the student's Personal Tutor, the Programme Leader and Support & Wellbeing Lead Coordinator). The student must signify her agreement with the plan in writing. The student's permission should be established before passing on information.

If the student continues to study during her pregnancy, she should meet regularly with her Personal Tutor to review her Support Plan. Plans will need to be reviewed at key stages, such as when the student is 16 weeks pregnant, 24 weeks pregnant, and prior to her return to study, or at key points of the academic year, such as prior to examinations and field trips. Support plans will also need to be reviewed prior to the student's return to study. Regular review is important as some decisions cannot be made at the start of a student's pregnancy, for example the length of maternity-related absence that she will take.

### 3.5 Health and Safety

Pregnancy should not be equated with ill health. However, there are health and safety considerations that arise during pregnancy and breastfeeding, and the risks to which a students and her unborn child could be exposed need to be assessed.

The greatest risk to an unborn baby is during its first 13 weeks and so it is important that the student informs the UCSD of her pregnancy as early as possible so that risks can be assessed and any necessary health and safety measures can identified and put in place in a timely fashion.

Close attention to health and safety measures will particularly be required in certain subject areas (e.g. where the student might be exposed to chemicals or radiation, or be expected to lift heavy objects or undertake other strenuous activity). Therefore, a Risk Assessment will be completed by the programme Manager and Support & Wellbeing Lead Coordinator as part of the drawing up of the Student Support in Pregnancy Plan (see 3.4 above). If necessary, South Devon College's Nurse and the Support & Wellbeing Lead Coordinator should be involved. The Risk Assessment will identify any risks that may be present which could harm the student or her baby, and detail steps that need to be put in place to alleviate or minimise these risks. It should also detail any risks that may arise from any placement period or fieldwork due to be undertaken (see also 3.6 and 3.7 below).

On occasion, it may not be practicable to alter the study conditions to alleviate or minimise the risk(s) connected with certain aspects of the course. Whilst USCD will seek to identify alternative ways of allowing a student to meet the learning outcomes of her course in these circumstances, there may be occasions when this is not feasible. It may therefore be necessary for a student to temporarily suspend their studies or transfer to part-time mode to delay undertaking given modules where there are specific risks to her health and safety while she is pregnant.

### 3.6 Field work

Students will not be permitted to take part in field work after the 35th week of pregnancy. In certain areas, the time limit may be less than this, depending upon the nature of the activity being undertaken and this must be identified within the risk assessment.

### 3.7 Students on work placement or studying overseas

If the student becomes pregnant whilst on a study year abroad or during a work placement, she must contact UCSD (via her Personal Tutor) to make appropriate plans to ensure that her health, and that of her child, is safeguarded and academic progress is properly managed. This is likely to require the university liaising with the overseas institution or placement provider. There may be circumstances where UCSD is limited in the support it can realistically offer to the student. Where this is judged to present a particular risk to the student or her unborn child, she may be strongly advised to take time out or transfer to a different programme of study.

Unless they are advised not to do so by their doctor or midwife, students should be able to travel during pregnancy. However, there are some considerations:

- Airlines have different policies and may not allow travel beyond 36 weeks or, in the event that the pregnancy is complicated or multiple, beyond 32 weeks. Students will need to check individual airline policies before travelling, and be aware that airlines will ask students for proof that it is safe for them to travel.
- UK students who are on placement or studying abroad will need to check their visa terms and conditions as they may need to extend their stay or return to the country at a later date.
- As pregnancy is considered a pre-existing condition by insurance companies, students who are pregnant prior to commencing a field trip or their placement or study abroad will need to check whether their insurance covers them for pre-existing conditions.

### 3.8 Resuming studies

**UCSD requires students to take a break from attending university of at least Two weeks after the birth of their child, on health and safety grounds.**

An indication of the timescale for return to study will have been incorporated into the Student Support in Pregnancy Plan. Students should make contact with their Personal Tutor after the birth of the baby to confirm their return plans or, if a change of plan is necessary, to discuss this in more detail.

If there are concerns about a student's health in relation to her proposed return date or her course requirements, Occupational Health must be consulted; it may be necessary for the student's GP or health worker to confirm the student's fitness to return to study.

### 3.9 Financial issues

Where students receive government funding support, they are strongly encouraged to contact the Student Funding unit to discuss the implications for their support. Generally, when students suspend their studies because of pregnancy Student Finance England can continue to award statutory support where the student requests it.

### 3.10 International students

International students with financial sponsors must contact their sponsors and agree a plan of action (such as deferring study/ when to resume study etc).

In addition to speaking to their Personal Tutor (and then to the Programme manager and Support & Wellbeing Lead Coordinator regarding the Student Support in Pregnancy Plan), all international students must contact the International Student Advice Service (ISAS) to discuss the impact of their pregnancy on their visa arrangements. USCD is required to report any Tier 4 student who suspends study to the UK Border Agency. Such students may be required to leave the UK during their Leave of Absence.

### 3.11 Babies / children on campus

Students must ensure they have suitable childcare arrangements in place at times when they are expected to be at University.

For health and safety reasons, as well as to avoid the disruption of classes or study, babies and children must not be brought into teaching, research or learning areas.

Students must not bring babies or children to University with the expectation that any staff member will take responsibility for caring for the child whilst the student is in classes.

Students may of course bring babies and children into public areas of UCSD, but UCSD cannot accept any liability for the child in these circumstances. Nappy changing facilities are available on site.

### 3.12 Breastfeeding

Students and staff are welcome to breastfeed their babies in public areas in the UCSD, including cafes. UCSD also acknowledges the need for breastfeeding mothers to have privacy and time to express milk and has provided a facility for the use of breast feeding.

### 3.13 Support for fathers and partners (including same-sex partners)

Any student who is to become a father, or any student who is a partner of a pregnant student (including same sex partners) who expects to be responsible for raising the child

with the mother, will be entitled to request time out of study. This is likely to include time to attend medical appointments with their partner prior to, and after the birth, as well as a period of maternity support leave immediately following the birth. Flexibility will be shown where possible although this will necessarily be more limited in some programmes than others.

Whilst their Personal Tutor would normally be the first point of contact, students can choose to speak to another member of staff with whom they feel more comfortable. If requested, the student's tutor will identify a female member of staff to liaise with the student (students should note that their Personal Tutor will normally be kept informed of the student's circumstances).

### 3.14 Adoption

As arrangements for the placing of children for adoption may take place within a very short timescale, it is important that students about to become parents through adoption should inform the HE Faculty Office of their circumstances as soon as possible.

Whilst their Personal Tutor would normally be the first point of contact, students can choose to speak to another member of staff with whom they feel more comfortable (students should note that their Personal Tutor will normally be kept informed of the student's circumstances).

A meeting with the student should then be arranged with the Programme Manger and the Support & Wellbeing Lead Coordinator in which an Adoption Plan; this can be based on the "Support in Pregnancy Plan" where appropriate.

## Appendix 1- Sources of advice and support outside the UCSD

### General organisations

- **Direct Gov**
  The UK government's website provides information on health, care and benefits during pregnancy, benefits for parents, and information on childcare providers in your local area (at www.childcarelink.gov.uk).
  www.direct.gov.uk

- **Family Planning Association**
  Aims to establish a society in which everyone can make informed choices about sex, relationships and reproduction. Its website contains impartial advice on pregnancy, abortion and adoption, and also contains a list of useful organisations.
  www.fpa.org.uk  Helpline: 0845 122 8690

- **National Health Service**
  Provides information relating to pregnancy, abortion, health in pregnancy and maternity, and services provided by the NHS.
  www.nhs.uk

- **National Union of Students**
  Provides information and advice to students and students' unions about student finance, rights and welfare. Information for student parents is available on its website, along with research and publications about students with dependent children.
  www.nus.org.uk

### Specific organisations

- **Adoption UK**
  A national charity run by and for adopters, providing self-help information, advice, support and training on all aspects of adoption and adoptive parenting.
  www.adoptionuk.org.uk

- **Antenatal Results and Choices**
  A national charity that provides non-directive support and information to expectant and bereaved parents throughout and after the antenatal screening and testing process.
  www.arc-uk.org

- **British Pregnancy Advisory Service**
  Supports reproductive choice and health by advocating and providing high-quality, affordable services to prevent or end unwanted pregnancies with contraception or by abortion. Also offers a range of other reproductive health services.
  www.bpas.org

- **Family and Parenting Institute**
  Provides support to parents in bringing up their children
  www.familyandparenting.org

- **The Miscarriage Association**
  Offers support and information to anyone affected by the loss of a baby in pregnancy.
  www.miscarriageassociation.org.uk

- **SANDS**
  The still birth and neonatal death charity – provides support to anyone affected by the loss of a baby and conducts research into the causes of still and neonatal death.
  www.uk-sands.org

## Appendix 2 - Further Guidance for Programme Teams

It is not possible to provide a definitive list of special arrangements that might be considered reasonable in every possible situation because the decisions about which arrangements are appropriate in each particular case will vary according to a wide range of factors. These factors include the student's individual circumstances, the time of year, the structure and content of the particular programme of study, restrictions imposed by professional bodies and any related health and safety matters.

Staff members are advised to take into account the following when considering what might be appropriate in a given case:

- A student's own views on her options are very important and it is vital that staff consult her openly on the way forward, rather than seeking to implement a predetermined set of adjustments.
- At the same time, it is important to note that UCSD do not have to agree to any or all requests made by the student. There may be some situations in which it is impossible or unreasonable for UCSD to agree to a particular request.
- To ensure best practice, and avoid any inadvertent discrimination, UCSD should not normally decline a request from a pregnant student for particular special arrangements solely on grounds that they are too costly to implement (although this may be one factor taken into account when deciding on the overall reasonableness of meeting the request).
- If UCSD decides to decline a flexibility request from a pregnant student, it is considered good practice for the Support & Wellbeing team to document its reasons for refusing the request and discuss with the student why this particular request is not considered "reasonable" in the particular circumstances.
- In cases where deferring her studies would lead to a student taking longer to complete a degree programme than would normally be permissible, UCSD may decline a request for further time out from studies (in order to ensure that the information gained in previous parts of the programme remains current enough to count towards the qualification in question). However, in these circumstances UCSD should still strive to demonstrate a flexible approach, where practicable, in relation to this deadline for programme completion, whilst ensuring that the student does not exceed the overall time limit allowed for her programme of study by UCSD or a relevant professional body.

Staff members are also welcome to seek bespoke advice on what might constitute appropriate flexibility in a particular case from the Support & Wellbeing Team, Sandy.akerman@southdevon.ac.uk

Occasionally, a situation may arise in which a programme team is already making allowances for an individual student for reasons not related to pregnancy (for example, for reasons linked to disability). This does not mean that it is unreasonable for her to benefit from separate/additional flexibility relating to her pregnancy. It is important that, in these situations, the programme team strives to separate out these different issues and clarify with the student what flexibility relates to which reasons. This approach will help programme team to ensure that the flexibility remains in place only for as long as it is required and also that they are complying with all of the different pieces of anti-discrimination legislation.

## Appendix 3 - Legal protection for students during pregnancy and maternity

(source: Equality Challenge Unit: Student pregnancy and maternity: implications for higher education institutions)

The Equality Act 2010 significantly strengthens legal protection for students (including applicants to higher education) during pregnancy and maternity in England, Scotland and Wales. The Act considers pregnancy and maternity to be a protected characteristic and prohibits discrimination on these grounds.

Section 17 of the Act expands the protection from discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy and maternity, which already exists for women in the workplace and vocational training, to women outside the workplace. In doing so, the Act specifically mentions the higher education sector. Under the Act, discrimination can occur against a student because of her pregnancy or because she has given birth if:

- the student is treated unfavourably because of her pregnancy
- within 26 weeks of the day of giving birth the student is treated unfavourably because she has given birth; this also applies in cases of miscarriage, still birth and neonatal death provided more than 24 weeks of the pregnancy has elapsed
- the student is treated unfavourably because she is breastfeeding and the child is less than 26 weeks old; if the child is more than 26 weeks old, unfavourable treatment because of breastfeeding is likely to constitute sex discrimination

The protection afforded due to pregnancy and maternity is narrower than other protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. Consequently there is no protection afforded for discrimination that occurs by being associated with someone who is pregnant or in a period of maternity, or being perceived to be pregnant or in a period of maternity. However, if a woman's partner is treated unfavourably because of her pregnancy or because she has given birth, this may constitute sex discrimination.

Under the Act, it is unlawful for HEIs to discriminate against applicants and students in relation to admissions; the provision of education; access to any benefit, facility or service; and disciplinary proceedings. The protected characteristic of pregnancy and maternity is included in the public sector equality duty (PSED) of the Equality Act. The PSED requires HEIs to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it
- foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it

Section 17 of the Equality Act 2010 commenced on 1 October 2010 and the PSED is expected to commence in April 2011. In the meantime, the gender equality duty continues to apply to HEIs in England, Scotland and Wales.

## Appendix 4 - Student Support in Pregnancy Plan

This form aims to guide discussions with students during pregnancy and maternity. It should be completed and agreed with the student. It is not intended that all the form should be completed at a first meeting as initially a student will be unable – and should not be expected – to respond to all the issues raised.

The form should be reviewed at key stages (e.g. 16 weeks pregnant, 24 weeks pregnant, and prior to return to study); or at key points of the academic year (e.g. prior to examinations and field trips). If the student's circumstances change, the plan will also need to be reviewed.

# Pregnancy Risk Assessment

**(To be completed by Programme Manager and Support & Wellbeing Lead Coordinator with student)**

**Name** …… **Student Number**……..

**Programme** …… **Stage** ……

**Due Date** …… **Date of Assessment** ……

## Pregnancy health and safety check sheet

| | YES | NO |
|---|---|---|
| **1 – Physical demands** | | |
| Does the programme involve lifting or pushing heavy objects? | | |
| Does the programme involve standing or squatting for long periods? | | |
| Does the programme involve a lot of walking? | | |
| Does the programme involve working at heights or climbing steep steps? | | |
| Does your programme involve prolonged physical activity eg dance | | |
| Does your programme involve accessing areas with limited space? | | |
| Will any tasks become more hazardous as the student changes size and shape? | | |
| | | |
| **2 – Mental demands** | | |
| Does the programme involve meeting challenging deadlines? | | |
| Does the programme involve rapidly changing priorities and demands? | | |
| Does the programme require a high degree of concentration? | | |
| | | |
| **3 – Working conditions – general** | | |
| Does the programme involve lone working or working in remote locations? | | |
| Are there any issues with accessibility to toilet facilities? | | |
| Are there any limitations to taking toilet breaks? | | |
| Can the student take rest breaks when needed? | | |
| Can the student control the pace of her work? | | |

Continued . . .

| *3 – **Working conditions – general – continued.*** | **YES** | **NO** |
|---|---|---|
| Are there any risks of violence at work? | | |
| Are there any obstacles in corridors or offices that could cause problems for pregnant women e.g. in the event of a fire evacuation? | | |
| Is the student exposed to smoking on campus? | | |
| Is the temperature in her working environment reasonable? | | |
| Will there be enough room as the pregnancy develops? | | |
| | | |
| **4 – Biochemical Hazards** | | |
| Does any part of the programme require participation in any workshops, laboratories, or clinical skills to be exposing the student to any of the following? | | |
| Ionising Radiation | | |
| Electromagnetic fields and waves | | |
| Extremes of heat | | |
| Lead and lead derivatives | | |
| Any biological / chemical agents | | |
| Other | | |
| | | |
| **4 – Equipment Hazards** | | |
| Does any part of the programme require participation in any workshops, laboratories, or clinical skills to be exposing the student to of the following? | | |
| Vibration | | |
| Noise | | |
| Heavy Machinery<br>Other | | |
| | | |
| **5. Other** | | |
| | | |
| Does the employee need to wear personal protective clothing? | | |
| If so, will this present a problem as the pregnancy develops? | | |
| Does any part of the programme involve dealing with members of the public? | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Contact with young children or sick people? | | |
| Unpredictable working hours? | | |
| Dealing with emergencies? | | |
| Distressed or disturbed people? | | |
| Does any part of the programme involve off campus activities eg fieldtrips or work based learning? | | |
| | | |
| Are there any other issues not identified above (please note in the comment box below) | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

**Any further comments made by student e.g. aches/pains health problems being experienced.**

| |
|---|
| |

**List agreed adjustments and control measures.**

| |
|---|
| |

**Review date** …….

**This checklist has been completed to the best of my knowledge**

Student signature ……. Date …….

Support & Wellbeing Lead Coordinator signature
……. Date …….

**The Support & Wellbeing Lead Coordinator should retain this form and send a copy to:**