

Learning and Teaching Support Handbook

Annex E (1): Co-Parental Leave for Postgraduate Research Students (PGRs)

The University of Exeter recognises that family groups are diverse. This policy applies to PGRs¹ inclusive of their gender identity, sexual orientation, gender expression, sex, if transitioning or their marital/civil partnership status.

Please contact dcqualitydevelopment@exeter.ac.uk with any feedback about the application of this policy or any suggestions for improvement.

1. Definitions

- 1.1. Shared Parental Leave (SPL) is an employment right which enables eligible mothers, fathers, parents, partners, and adopters to choose how to share time off work after their child is born or placed. This could mean that the birth parent or primary adopter shares some of the leave with their partner. Shared Parental Leave is created where an eligible birth parent or adopter brings their maternity or adoption leave to an end early. This is called “curtailing” maternity or adoption leave. The untaken weeks of maternity or adoption leave can be taken as SPL if the birth parent/adopter and their partner are eligible for this – up to a maximum of period of 26 weeks.
- 1.2. **PGRs in receipt of a studentship are not eligible for statutory SPL**, as confirmed by the [UKRI statement on parental leave for doctoral students](#). Both SPL and Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP) are defined in law and operated by HMRC. For a parent to benefit from either SPL or ShPP they must meet the legal eligibility criteria. This includes a requirement that they are an employee. PGR students are not employees² and so are not able to give HMRC the information required to process an application. Research organisations have therefore not been able to operate SPL or ShPP for UKRI students.

¹ PGRs enrolled on a Professional Doctorate programme may face limitations on when they can take leave as described in this policy, due to the structure of the taught phases of the programme. Whilst we will do what we can to support such students, there may be limitations on the flexibility of leave during the taught phases. Students affected by this are encouraged to discuss their circumstances with their PGR Support Team in the first instance.

² PGRs who are employed as a member of staff at the University of Exeter (not as an Associate or PTA), or PGRs funded by some EU programmes may meet the employment eligibility for statutory SPL and are encouraged to discuss their eligibility for SPL with their line manager in the first instance.

2. PGR Co-Parental Leave

- 2.2. The University recognises the potential benefits to new parents or adopters in being able to share leave and wishes to put in place a policy to enable this for PGRs who receive their stipend from a University-funded source, including UKRI funding.
- 2.3. PGRs who receive funding from sources external to the University of Exeter will need to check their eligibility for this leave with their funder directly.
- 2.4. This policy cannot emulate the same leave opportunities for funded PGRs as it can for employees in every detail, due to the statutory limitations detailed above. It is, however, designed to offer a similar opportunity to PGRs, at least in part based on trust.
- 2.5. As this policy does not refer to Shared Parental Leave in a statutory sense, it will hereafter be referred to **PGR Co-Parental Leave (CPL)**.

3. Principles for University-funded PGRs

- 3.1. Co-Parental Leave does not create a new leave entitlement. Instead, it enables leave to be shared. For CPL, the PGR must be sharing the care of their child between the two parents or adopters during the year following the birth or placement of their child. And be one of:
 - a. the birth parent;
 - b. the primary adopter;
 - c. the spouse, civil partner, or partner of the birth parent / primary adopter;
- 3.2. In order to be eligible for CPL, the PGR must be in receipt of a University-funded stipend at the expected time of the birth of the child or adoption placement and one of the following must be the case:
 - 3.2.1. Both parents or adopters are University-funded PGRs or are PGRs whose funding allows co-parental leave to be taken (or an equivalent of such leave). In this case, with the consent of both students, the University will permit the leave to be shared and the normal University maternity stipend (up to 26 weeks or pro-rata) to be shared in the period following the birth of the child. The co-parental

leave does not have to be consecutive (each parent could take shorter periods or could take the leave at the same time).

3.2.2. **The birth parent/primary adopter is the partner of the PGR** and is entitled to statutory maternity or adoption leave and pay. If the birth parent/primary adopter chooses to curtail their maternity or adoption leave, this may be shared with the PGR. If the birth parent/primary adopter chooses to curtail their maternity or adoption pay, the PGR will be entitled to a stipend at the rate usually provided to them by the University for the duration that their partner has curtailed their allowance, up to a maximum of 26 weeks (or pro-rata).

3.2.3. **The birth parent/primary adopter is the partner of the PGR** and is self-employed and entitled to adoption/maternity allowance. If the birth parent/primary adopter chooses to curtail their maternity or adoption leave, this may be shared by the PGR. If the birth parent/primary adopter chooses to curtail their maternity or adoption pay, the PGR will be entitled to a stipend at the rate usually provided by the University for the duration that their partner has curtailed their allowance, for up to a maximum of 26 weeks (or pro-rata).

3.3. There are instances where eligibility to support CPL is not within the University's power to award. In the scenarios below, the University will do what it can to support students, but it should be noted that due to the legal restrictions on statutory parental pay, there may be instances where parental leave cannot be shared between student and their employed or self-employed partner. Students in the following scenarios are advised to contact their PGR Support Team in the first instance but should be aware that their options for paid CPL may not be possible.

3.3.1. The **PGR is the birth parent/primary adopter**, and the partner is employed or self-employed and entitled to statutory shared parental leave. If the PGR chooses to curtail their maternity or adoption leave, this may be shared by the partner, although this will be at the discretion of the partner's employer.

4. Process

4.2. PGRs eligible for, and electing to take, CPL must apply for an interruption on parental grounds for the duration.

- 4.3. Before applying for the interruption, the PGR should discuss their plans with their supervisory team and PGR Support Team.
- 4.4. Applications for CPL will normally be made at least eight weeks before the CPL is requested to begin. This is to allow sufficient time for the request to be reviewed, followed up as required, and actioned when approved.
- 4.5. Applicants should fill in this short form to apply for CPL under this policy confirming that their partner is eligible for CPL and intends to curtail their maternity leave/allowance with the relevant dates.
- 4.6. The University will not check with the employer about the curtailment and expects PGRs to be honest. If applications are discovered to have been misleading, the University will expect to recoup any payments made for the purpose of co-parental leave.
- 4.7. Standard UKVI restrictions on leave will apply for PGRs with student visas as there are no exceptions for parental leave. This means it will not be possible to take a substantial period of leave whilst maintaining visa sponsorship; please consult the terms of the visa and the International Student Support Office for further guidance.

5. Postgraduate research students not funded by the University

- 5.1. Students not funded by the University of Exeter, or where the student may not be entitled to co-parental leave (or an equivalent of such leave) as defined by this policy. It is the student's responsibility to confirm their eligibility with their funder.
- 5.2. The University is committed to working with funders and sponsors to promote its approach to co-parental leave, and to encourage more of them to enable this.
- 5.3. All PGRs are entitled to apply for an interruption to study, although PGRs on student visas would need to be mindful of the permitted absence from study.

- 5.4. Alternative options for leave related to maternity, paternity or adoption are available In the TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 25: Student Pregnancy, Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Policy.